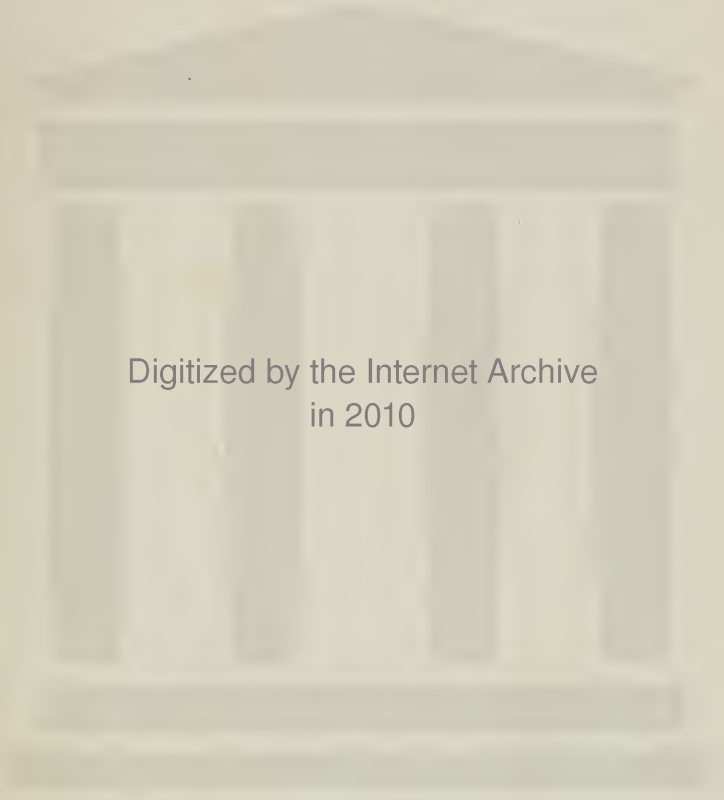
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CATHERINE DE MEDICIS

THE WORKS OF

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

IN THIRTY VOLUMES

THE COUNTESS OF MONTE CRISTO

VOLUME ONE

ILLUSTRATED WITH A FRONTISPIECE
IN PHOTOGRAVURE

NEW YORK
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THE COUNTESS OF MONTE-CRISTO

PROLOGUE

THE TREASURE OF THE COUNT OF RANCOGNE

CHAPTER I

THE THREE SHADOWS OF NOIRMONT

WE ARE in the province called "Limousin," situated in the central part of France. The roads, which are beginning now to cut through the country in different directions, were not yet planned.

Only pathways lying between high chalk hills lead to the scattered villages and farmhouses.

The horizon is continually obscured by the dense veil formed by the chestnut trees.

Sometimes the path winds along a smooth road. Then the eye observes here and there meadows, the glistening surface of a pond, and the bluish hills, which disappear in the smoky atmosphere.

Under the feet of the wanderer arise in the shape of terraces the almost black verdure of the woods, or the red and brown flowers of the buckwheat.

Everywhere the picture of solitude, so dear to the dreamer, shows itself.

At the edge of a narrow sheet of water, which looked more like a gorge than a valley, stands a disordered mass of buildings crowned at the top by three tall chimneys.

This gigantic lighthouse casts its dazzling light upon the surrounding heights, like a stake piled up by Titans.

The general appearance of the place recalls a castle and a workshop combined. Half ruined towers still show their blackened tops as if they had just undergone a siege.

Round about is an immense pond, which grows narrower toward the north, and is spanned by a stone bridge, which has taken the place of the old drawbridge, the two small towers of which could still be seen.

Nothing could be more fantastic than this scene at twilight.

The tall, black towers bathe their feet in a dark-brown, golden halo, and their tops look as if ornamented with a red cluster of feathers.

To this is added a terrific noise—the roar of the water, the metallic ring of the falling hammer, and the howling of the wind through the forest.

The present ironworks of Noirmont was formerly the Castle of Noirmont, as could still be seen by the crumbled towers and thick walls. But that was long ago! The oldest inhabitants can only remember when it was in ruins.

At that time—that is, twenty years before the commencement of our story—owls and other night-birds were the only inhabitants of this gloomy dwelling.

All kinds of curious stories were told about the place, and after sundown even the most courageous peasant never went past it without first crossing himself. Superstitious people preferred to take a roundabout way, and walked

three-fourths of a mile up the hill to shun these haunted ruins.

It needed only a few years and but one man to turn this ruined fortress of the former counts into a lively industrial establishment.

This man was perhaps a man of genius, and had, no doubt, been guided by a good aim, for though enriching himself, he enriched the whole neighborhood at the same time.

He made use of the woods, gave employment to many hands, and the waterfall, after so many centuries of idleness, resumed its wonted activity.

In a short time everything became changed. The houses became almost habitable; the number of sick persons diminished, because the nourishment was better and the wages higher; the fields were cultivated, money flowed, and a whole population was instilled with new life through a single man.

This was the work of Count George de Rancogne, a work which he unfortunately did not complete.

About six months before the commencement of this story, he had died, universally mourned, and sincerely deplored by his young widow.

We are now in the latter part of March, and night has come.

The chimneys of the iron-works do not smoke any more. Even the waterfall is silent. The large paddle-wheels were motionless.

No noise would have been heard, had not the wind whistled through the trees and the rain whipped the bushes.

The weather was miserable, and in the courtyards of

the building a dog from time to time uttered that prolonged, dismal howl, which superstitious people maintain denotes the approach of some death.

Yet if one listened carefully, the sound of a horse's hoofs could be heard.

Near the castle, between the pond and the wall of the factory building, a shadow is moving here and there, the shadow of a man.

Just at the moment the horse's hoofs could be heard the man stood still. He listens.

On the other side near the garden stands another shadow —that of a woman—motionless, near a door which opens on the road. She, too, is waiting.

On a third spot, finally, between the new buildings and the servants' houses, a third shadow—that of a boy about fifteen—climbs on to the mill with a skill which showed that he was used to that exercise.

Just as the boy made a motion to descend from the wall on which he was sitting, he suddenly paused and stretched out his neck, as if to listen. Then he shook his head.

"It is the wind," he said. "I was mistaken."

Then he glided into the courtyard.

He was not mistaken, however. A double noise could be heard above the roar of the storm, a loud, piercing whistle and the cry of a night-bird.

At this double signal the promenader in the courtyard and the watcher at the garden gate came down from the dark wall; the woman to approach a young man whose features were concealed by an enormous Limousin peasant hat, the man to jump into a boat which noiselessly glided over the water of the pond.

On the opposite side of the stream a horseman impatiently waited.

"Ah, there you are at last, doctor," murmured the oarsman, in a low voice. "We need your services to-night. But first I must speak with you. You can put your horse under the shed over there. Come quickly."

They both stepped into the boat, which took the direction of the castle.

In the meantime the following conversation took place on the other side:

"Is it you, Monsieur Octave?" asked the fresh, young voice of a girl, mysteriously.

As the young man who was dressed like a peasant was silent, the speaker seized him by the hand and continued:

"The countess hides nothing from me, and I, on the other hand, would sacrifice my life for her."

She cast down her eyes and murmured:

"I would willingly sacrifice my life for any one that the countess loves."

She felt the hand which she still held in her own tremble, and the young man was hardly able to ask:

"For any one that she loves?"

"She was very melancholy," said the young girl, shaking her splendidly shaped blonde head; "but since she received your note she is almost gay. We must love her, Monsieur Octave, for she has suffered so much."

The door of the garden was opened and closed, and Octave, following his guide, directed his steps toward the house.

Just as he was about to enter the castle, he begged his guide to pause for a moment.

"Rosa," he said, "many things have happened since duty exiled me from Noirmont. These things I must know before I go up."

As he said this, he pointed to a dim light shining through the shutters on the first story.

"Well, then, follow me," murmured the young girl.

Instead of entering the house, she turned to the right, and, followed by Octave, took the road to the centre building.

Neither of them noticed that a fourth person was silently following them.

"I am leading you along the most uncomfortable and longest road," said Rosa; "if we had gone to the house we would have been obliged to pass the countess's room."

Octave nodded assent and disappeared behind his guide through the always open door of a servants' staircase.

The spy followed them here too.

The two young persons had entered a small room, which was dimly lighted by an ordinary lamp.

It contained a wooden bedstead, a table, and a large trunk. At the top of the bed stood a holy-water kettle, fastened by a branch of boxwood. On the table was an earthen pot of flowers.

"Madame is sleeping," said Rosa; "we have plenty of time."

Octave allowed his gaze to sweep around this asylum of cleanliness, and, so to speak, virginity.

Rosa noticed it and blushed.

"It is my room," she said.

The young man took off his broad-brimmed hat, and a noble face, with dark hair, was seen by the light of the lamp.

Rosa devoured him with her eyes, and in her gaze something like a smile could be seen.

"I was very small when you went away, but yet I recognized you at once."

"And I you, too, Rosa," cried Octave. "I recognized you, too, and you see I place full reliance in you, for I am initiating you into a secret on which life and honor depend."

As he said this he took Rosa's hand in his and pressed it to his heart.

"The secrets which live here," she replied, "will slumber eternally; listen to what has happened in your brother's house since you went away."

The spy had slipped up the stairs, and stood now close to the door of the room. He curiously peered through the keyhole. Octave stood with bared head in the direction of the small opening.

The spy uttered a low cry.

"It is he!"

At this moment the two men in the rowboat were softly speaking to each other.

"Then," said the doctor, trembling either with fear or fright, "then this evening?"

The oarsman made a gesture of assent and replied:

"Yes, count yourself. It is just nine months."

"It's a nasty job, Monsieur Champion."

"Ah, nonsense, Dr. Toinon; it will be well paid."

"More especially the other—" murmured the doctor in a disheartened way.

He did not conclude the sentence.

A prolonged whistle pierced the air.

Champion's face beamed with triumph.

"The other!" he repeated; "the other—is here!"

CHAPTER II

THE FOUR LIGHTS

FOUR lights penetrate, like four fiery eyes, the enormous façade of Noirmont.

One of them is the dim light shining through the shutters to which Octavo had called his guide's attention and said:

"I must know these things or else I shall not go up."

The second shone through the half closed blinds of the little room in which we left the two young persons alone.

The third issues from the further end of the factory building and throws a faint light on the smooth surface of the pond.

The fourth finally illuminates a doorway leading into the courtyard.

Let us proceed to this place first.

According to the needs of our story we will refer to each of the actions which these several lights shine upon.

In a very large room, similar to a cooperage shop, we see an old man and a young one who was still almost a boy.

The large space seems to be larger still than it really

is, for it was lighted only by a tallow candle which stood on the mantel-piece.

On the hearth two burning logs had just become extinguished.

The floor was covered with half-finished casks, hoops, and boards.

The old man lies on a bag of straw, and is partly protected from the cold by several thin cloth covers.

The boy is sitting on a block of wood and listens with feverish attention to the half-crazy words of the invalid.

From time to time the invalid sits upright and stretches out his long bony arm to clutch the cup the boy offers him.

His face lights up again and he continues:

"Joseph, the moment has come. The last hour is about to strike."

"Ah, do not talk so, Father Biasson! Of death—"

"Do you hear? Noireau is baying at the moon. The candle has been seen on the heights of Frandral, and who loves Rancogne will speak of this night twenty years from now."

Then, with the activity caused by the fever, the old man turned to another subject and continued:

"Rancogne is a real aristocratic race, Joseph. That is as true as that we are both Christians. In former times it was hard to find a family as brave and good as they were. They owned Noirmont, Apreval and Rancogne, together with all the woods and fields, hills and valleys. The Counts of Rancogne were brave and proud. People spoke of treasures which were concealed in the cellars of their castles, and Messieurs de Rochechouart themselves called each other our cousins. In truth it was a fine family! Later on the evil days came. In our whole neighbor-

hood the sword was held aloof. That was long ago, and even the fathers of the fathers cannot remember it. These things cannot be found in histories. The Rancognes were devoted to their feudal lord, who fought for the Protestants, but luck was against them. Noirmont was plundered and half destroyed; Rancogne, that beautiful castle, was razed to the ground; salt was strewn on the spot it stood on, and the trees in the garden and forest were split in the middle. Since then they have grown again, but the beautiful castle of Rancogne no longer exists, not even in the memory of its subjects."

The old man sighed heavily. After a short pause he continued:

"Joseph, death approaches and I am very feeble. You must learn all. The moment is at hand when the Rancognes will not have another friend in the world besides you. A few years before the Revolution, they, who had been the kings of this province, were but poor noblemen. Their pride, however, had not been bent by misfortune. Old Count Jean was a real aristocratic nobleman, although it did not take him many hours to make a circuit of his estate. His sons, Francois and Guillaume, were also brave, honest young men. Although their costumes were made of coarse cloth, yet brave hearts beat beneath, and old Jean, when the nobles met in council, could point with pride at his sons."

Again the old man made a short pause; then he continued:

"Francois was the eldest. He was as strong as an ox, and looked like his father. Guillaume was the youngest. He was as handsome as a woman, and looked like his mother.

"Ah, Joseph, what an affecting sight it was to see the old count sitting in his great oaken chair between his two sons, who trembled before him, yet loved and respected him, as we love and respect God.

"Nevertheless, it was one of the two, and, in fact, the favorite son, whose face recalled to the old count the pictures of the saints, who gave his father the mortal blow.

"The Countess Marie had adopted the daughter of one of her tenants, and brought her up as if she were her own child. She was called Jeanne.

"Jeanne was very beautiful. She was hardly sixteen. One could not look at her without laughing with joy, and the old count sometimes said, as he played with the young girl's locks:

" 'My dear sons, we must soon look out for a husband for this girl.'

"Jeanne would blush, and Guillaume hang down his head and bite his lips.

"Guillaume and Jeanne loved each other.

"They had been brought up together, had coursed through the woods and meadows in company with each other; Guillaume knew of no one handsomer than his Jeanne, Jeanne knew of no one handsomer than her Guillaume.

"Old Count Jean thought it merely fraternal affection, and laughed at it.

"One day when he tried to appear stern it was too late.

"The scene was a terrible one. The old man commanded, his son stood shuddering, with his eyes cast to the ground, and gave no answer. Through the thick wooden doors the loud voice of the count could be heard. Then Guillaume raised his—first softly, trembling and

humble, then firmly courageous and loud. The blood of the young lion was aroused.

"What had the father and son said to each other during the hour in which they had been locked up together? No one besides themselves ever found out, and no one besides themselves will ever find out. There are words which cannot be twice repeated.

"This much is certain, that Guillaume came out of the room looking deathly pale, and that the old count had the covers of his son and his adopted daughter removed from the family table that evening, saying he had now only *one* son.

"From that day on his strength visibly decreased. He was no longer seen on horseback. A little while after he did not leave his garden, then his room, and at the end of a few months he lay down in the large bed ornamented with the family arms, and never got up again."

Father Biasson made an effort to clear his voice, which had become choked with emotion.

Joseph handed him the cup, whose contents he greedily drank.

"My powers are weakening more and more," he then said. "I will tell my story to the end, however. The death couch of the old count was not without some consolation. Two years before, Francois had married a handsome young girl, and a curly-haired child played at the foot of the bed in which the count was gradually sinking away. Nevertheless, neither the tenderness of his daughter-in-law, nor the handshake of his eldest son, nor the play of his grandchild, replaced the absent one—the absent one whom he had cursed, and who was his son no longer."

At this point Biasson broke into a loud sob. After he had calmed himself a little he continued:

"When the rebels had decapitated the king, Francois, together with his wife and little son George, sought the protection of the Prince of Condé's army. For many years as little was heard of him as of his brother Guillaume. Yet there were two Rancognes somewhere in the world—George Francois, first-born, and his brother Octave, who had been born in exile."

In Rosa's room Octave and the young girl sat next to each other.

"When I first came here," continued Octave, "you were still very small, Rosa, and I do not know whether you still remember it. Joy and life reigned in Noirmont. My brother George saw that the time for class distinctions had gone by and that, in our century, an aristocratic family could only rise through intelligence and hard work. The factory was already in full swing. The iron works of Noirmont had become celebrated; in fact more celebrated than the castle of Noirmont had ever been. The industrial world, which had at first kept away from George de Rancogne, probably on account of his title, turned from all sides to the young husband of the citizen's daughter, Helene Roumieux. In the brilliantly illuminated works festivals took place. The young Count George beamed with joy, the bride appeared to be happy, and I alone was in torments on that evening."

Rosa's sweet eyes looked affectionately at the young man, who continued, in a low voice:

"I had come with the firm purpose of reproaching my brother. His *mesalliance* made me angry. I was very young then, almost a child, and had ideas which later on were considerably modified.

"A single glance from Helene disarmed me, a second

one made me her slave. Six months, six long months, Rosa, I stood this martyrdom—the martyrdom of loving a woman who belonged to another, to my brother. I felt a bitter pleasure in my grief. The more I suffered, the more I wished to suffer, and instead of going away, I remained and observed this double happiness with an envious jealousy, which cut my heart."

Octave paused a few moments, then continued:

"One day—eternal curses over that day!—I believed that I perceived that I *alone* was not weeping in silence. Another sobbing answered mine. From that day on—I assure you on my word of honor, Rosa—my resolution was taken. I went to my brother, who had no suspicion, and said good-by to him. Since then I have wandered all over and tried to find death, which persisted in shunning me. Three months ago, in consequence of the July revolution, civil war broke out in La Vendée. I hurried thither. I fought for the Duchess of Berry, braved danger twenty times. We were conquered, but I am not dead. To-day my resolution is again taken, just as it was on the day I left my brother, never to see him again. I wish to say to her I love so dearly a last farewell, and—"

"And?" asked Rosa.

"We were conquered," replied Octave in a faint voice; "a price has been set on my head and the road to Limoges is watched by policemen."

"Conspirators are not shot nowadays," said Rosa, laughing.

"No," replied Octave as if speaking to himself, "but the conspirators who defend themselves are shot down."

Rosa became pale as death.

"And you intend to defend yourself?" she cried.

"Yes, because I wish to be killed," he simply replied.

The young girl clasped her hands together, and her eyes supported the prayer of her gesture.

"Listen to me," she cried after a while, "afterward you can get yourself killed if you wish—your brother George knew all!"

Octave stared at her in amazement.

"He knew that you loved Helene, and that you were loved in return by her. He trusted, however, in your chivalry and in his wife's sense of honor. As long as he lived he never betrayed the secret by a word; he was never seen to be more gloomy or impatient than ordinarily, and yet he too was jealous. Count George however possessed a noble heart. The factory prospered. My mistress, who had perceived the silent grief of her husband, had, through gratitude for his superhuman generosity, turned her heart toward him again. The count, who only desired to be deceived in this matter, took it to be love. His wife believed, too, that she had finally forgotten. They were happy as long as it was possible to be so. It was about this time that Count George made a distant relative of my mistress, Hercules Champion, steward and manager of the estate. With the advent of that man, misfortune entered the house."

"Hercules Champion!" exclaimed Octave hurriedly. "You are mistaken there! I owe it to him that I am still living. Only recently he rescued me from my pursuers; he got me this disguise, and if I have to be rescued again to-morrow he will do it again."

"I do not accuse Monsieur Champion," replied Rosa. "He may be, as you say, a faithful and true relative;

whether it is his fault or not, one thing is certain, misfortune entered the house with him."

"How so?"

"Without any one knowing the reason why, and without a just cause for complaint on the score of negligence, business began to get bad all of a sudden. Every day Count George sat down at table looking more gloomy and melancholy than ever. His low spiritedness worked disastrously on his health. He became pale and fell off as much in a few months as if he had been sick for years. The feebler he grew, the more necessary his strength was to him to superintend and overlook his rapidly decreasing business."

"Go on! Go on!" murmured Octave, as Rosa made a pause.

"Low spiritedness and sickness," she continued, "soon did their common work. He had to lie in bed, and from that day on his life was only one long death struggle. How gladly he would have wished to live, for he was about to see himself live over again in a child, which will now not learn anything of its father save the inscription on his tombstone. On the day he died he had his wife called to his bedside. Joseph and I were in an anteroom."

"Who is Joseph?"

The young girl blushed up to the roots of her hair as she answered:

"He is the grandchild of poor Jeannisson, a woman of this neighborhood, who died the same year she came here. If Rancogne is ever in need of a person who will die for him, Joseph is the man. We, Joseph and I, were in the antechamber, and Count George called to us in his faint

voice, which I still believe I hear: 'Come here, children,' he said, 'and listen to what I shall tell your mistress. I know that you are faithful, and should your testimony ever be needed, I am sure you will give it.'

"Then he turned to his weeping wife and continued:

"Helene, you have always been a true and faithful wife to me. Everything which belonged to me is now yours. Here is my will; to the codicils it contains I desire to add a verbal condition which cannot be written out. You are still young, Helene. A child will be born to us which my eyes will never see. Therefore I desire to give my wife and my child a protector. Helene, you are my only heiress. I injure the interests of my brother Octave, for your sake, because I know this is the only remedy to overcome your devotion. Helene, I want you to marry my brother Octave. Do you hear it?" he added as he turned to us. "I demand it."

"Then he gave us to understand with a gesture that we should leave the room."

Octave de Rancogne buried his face in his hands, and big tears trickled between his fingers.

Rosa silently observed him for a few seconds, then continued in a timid voice:

"Monsieur Octave, the hour has come. The child, the testament of your brother—your child—will be born this evening."

. . . . . .

The first light still shone.

In the workshop which served as his habitation, old Biasson continued his secret communication in a voice continually growing weaker:

"Rancogne's enemy," he said, "is under Rancogne's

roof. He lives from his bread, and before the day breaks he will have triumphed, and neither you nor I can hinder him. But the noble race must not perish in this way, and I know a secret which will cause it to shine forth brighter and stronger than ever. I tried to do it myself, but could not. I am old and feeble. If we wish to forget we deaden our memory with brandy. This secret, which stands so clear before me now because I am at the point of death, and one remembers everything at such a moment, I already desired to communicate to Count George, but he laughed at me. Every one considers me a fool. You alone have always had confidence in me. To you therefore belongs the secret which will rescue Rancogne and make it again rich and great."

The old man paused for a while, and then continued:

"Listen to me. It is a story known to all the peasants hereabout, and any one of them could tell it to you as well as I. I often heard it from old Count Jean's own mouth, who laughed over it as the others laughed over it, and I know the road which leads to the treasure of the Rancognes. It lies in one of the grottoes which are under the spot whereon the Castle of Rancogne formerly stood. These subterranean passages and vaults resemble the streets and places of a city, and you might go close by the treasure a thousand times without finding it."

Again the old man was forced to make a pause, before he could continue:

"One day when it began to go down hill with Rancogne, and when I began to suspect the horrible deed which will be carried out this very evening, I tried to collect my thoughts, and at the expiration of eight days the

right thing came to my mind. I went away from here. For a week I was thought to be dead. Everywhere they hunted for me. I, however, was in the vaults of Rancogne. I searched—I searched—and I found!

Biasson raised himself erect, and enthusiastically cried:

"Yes, I found it! This hand here felt the gold—Rancogne's gold—which is piled in boxes. When I came back here, I wished to inform Count George of all I saw. He only laughed at me, though, and told me I was crazy. You alone, Joseph, believed me, and you alone shall be informed of it."

Joseph listened attentively to the old man. He hardly dared to trust his ears, and thought he was dreaming.

Old Biasson nervously clutched his arm, looked sharply in his face and said:

"You believe me, and what I tell you you will do, won't you?"

Joseph hesitated a second and then replied in a firm voice:

"Yes, I believe you, and whatever you tell me to do I shall do."

"Well, then," said the old man as he joyously clapped his hands, "then Rancogne is saved."

The invalid's enthusiasm was so great that he jumped out of bed and danced about the room.

Joseph, who had really believed what he said, became doubtful again when he saw this crazy action, and thought to himself:

"The old man has lost his senses. The treasure which is to save Rancogne exists no doubt only in his disordered brain."

In the meanwhile the invalid had knelt down in a

corner of the large room and scratched a hole in the soft earth with his finger-nails.

"But, Father Biasson," cried Joseph, "you will catch cold! Lie down again in your bed!"

Biasson turned around with a disdainful look and said:

"You imagine I am crazy? You do not wish to do what I shall tell you?"

"Oh, yes! oh, yes! I shall do it. But lie down in bed again. I shall do it."

"Will you swear it to me?"

"Yes, I swear it, so help me God."

"Well, then," cried Biasson, as he waved a portfolio still covered with earth. "Then Rancogne is saved. Yes, even though Count Octave falls into the trap set by his enemies, even though the Countess Helene and her still unborn child should become the prey of these scoundrels, even then Rancogne is saved."

At this moment old Biasson was really talking wildly. With the exception of Count Octave and the widow of his brother George, there was no other Rancogne in the world.

Joseph could not refrain from shrugging his shoulders.

Biasson observed it, but did not fly into a passion on account of it.

"It doesn't matter whether he believes me or not. He has sworn to do as I told him."

And as he muttered this to himself, he took two papers out of the portfolio. One of these was a carefully sealed envelope, and the second a small dirty note, upon which was an awkwardly drawn plan.

On the cover was Joseph's name. Joseph wished to open it. Biasson held his hand.

"Swear to me," he said, "that you will not break this seal before you have the treasure in your possession."

"That means never," thought Joseph.

"Swear to me that you will, as long as there is a Rancogne living, devote your life, your mind and your work to him, and that you will not open this paper before the day when you will see him, rich, honored, and free from every danger, return to the home of his fathers."

The solemnity of the scene involuntarily impressed Joseph, and he began to have faith again.

"I swear it," he said, in a voice full of emotion.

"Then look at the other paper and listen."

"But this one here!—this one here!" exclaimed Joseph, as he shook the envelope, which was burning his fingers.

"That one," murmured Biasson, "contains your reward and my justification."

. . . . . .

What was going on in the two other lighted rooms of the castle of Noirmont, while Joseph was listening to the old cooper and Octave to the handsome Rosa?

In a room on the ground floor three men were sitting around a bottle of wine.

Two of them we have already met, and, in spite of the darkness which conceals their faces, we recognize them as Hercules Champion and Dr. Toinon.

Their companion was Jean Baptiste Matifay, and a broker by profession.

"Well, then," said Champion, as he arose and leaned against the fireplace, "you can either do it or not, just as you feel inclined."

"Twenty thousand is very little, though, my dear Champion," said Matifay, in his flute-like voice.

"Yes, very little," Toinon was going to repeat, had not a look from Champion restrained him.

"If you grumble," said Champion, "I must inform you that I can send you both to the galleys."

Toinon began to tremble; Matifay remained calm.

"You know, dear friend," he said, "that we should soon have you for a companion then."

Champion bit his nails.

"Let us settle this matter at once," he hurriedly cried. "What are your demands?"

"That's the way I like to hear you talk," replied Matifay. "Why should we quarrel? We are here to talk over our interests, are we not? Hercules, you are a shrewd fellow and a good friend. Your impetuosity harms you though. Do not be angry at me for speaking so openly. We must give an old comrade good advice. In business we must be a little generous, and you are not."

The two men shook hands. Toinon, who was calmer now, drank a glass of wine, and smilingly looked at the others.

"The business is not so good as we believed," murmured Champion as he sat down again.

"Excuse me, Hercules," replied Matifay, "I believe you do not understand its good sides. I think it a brilliant, splendid piece of business."

"There are dangers connected with it," said Champion.

"For us, yes, but not for you. You are very sharp, my friend, and I always gave you credit for being so. In case of a misfortune, no suspicion would fall upon you. The doctor and I would be sacrificed. Yet, I am not complaining about that! You are the legitimate heir, you have real rights. We must first conquer, to be able to divide. But

should it come to a division, then, for God's sake, do not haggle. Are we not almost like brothers?"

He was so affected that he could hardly speak.

Toinon let a tear fall in his glass.

"Like brothers! Like brothers!" repeated Champion, in a slightly ironical tone.

"How much is the factory worth?" asked Matifay.

"Four hundred thousand francs."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, because we allowed things to run down so as to give some explanation for Count George's rather sudden death. That was a great misfortune, and were we to try to go to the bottom of the matter—"

"Would find that his death through grief had great similarity with death by poisoning," said the doctor.

"Certainly! Poor George died because the factory was going downhill. He wasn't careful enough; our friend Champion, on the other hand, who is the smartest business man in the whole province, will, inside of one or two years, restore Noirmont to its former prosperity, and instead of its present value, it will be worth again eight hundred thousand francs."

Champion shook his head, but said nothing.

Matifay, who had made a pause to allow an interruption to be made, continued:

"Up there toward Apreval there are some fine forests. On my way here I saw them. I saw oaks there which I would not sell to the Navy Department for five thousand francs. Besides this, the estate of Noirmont includes meadows, farms and other pieces of ground. All that counts for something too. How much do you think it's worth?"

"About one hundred thousand francs."

"I'll take it for one hundred and fifty thousand francs! But, no! That was only a joke. I shall never take advantage of a friend. Let us say two hundred and fifty thousand francs. I shall write, then, two hundred and fifty thousand francs."

And as Matifay said this, he dipped his index finger in the glass and wrote on the corner of the table, first 800,000 and then 250,000.

"Let us now take up the matter of the portfolio."

Champion uttered a groan.

"Let us now take up the matter of the portfolio," repeated Matifay. "We have nothing to conceal from Toinon, have we? Although he has nothing to do with this matter, his presence at the discussion is not superfluous. In accordance with contracts made between me and the iron works of Noirmont, I have bought since two years two hundred thousand francs' worth of goods."

Toinon opened his eyes in astonishment, and innocently asked himself:

"Where could he have got those two hundred thousand francs?"

"The goods I sold over again only brought one hundred and ninety thousand francs, but that is something; and it would be indeed a wonder if a practical, methodical man like you didn't make your twenty thousand francs' profit. I am positive you made more, but will not look so closely at it. Let us, then, say two hundred thousand francs for the portfolio."

Then he continued, adding:

"Five, eight and two make ten, and two makes twelve —one million two hundred and fifty thousand francs all told. That is the whole story."

Champion could have interposed an objection to the account, but desisted. Figures never lie.

The doctor, dazed at the result of the enormous addition, felt the perspiration dripping from his forehead. In a low voice he repeated the respectable sum, as if to impress it on his memory:

"One million two hundred and fifty thousand francs! The little one who will be born to-night would have been very rich!"

CHAPTER III

CHAMPION, MATIFAY, TOINON & CO.

THE conversation became livelier.

Champion had, as his dark-red face showed, drank half a bottle of brandy alone.

Dr. Toinon was a little pale, and left a glass of wine stand untouched before him.

Matifay preferred to drink anise-seed, and his bushy eyes looked stealthily from one to the other.

The moment is convenient to make the reader better acquainted with these three honorable persons.

Honor to whom honor is due. Let us begin with the master of the house.

Some people say that you can tell an oyster by its shell, and though we do not like to make scientific comparisons in a novel, yet we will first take a look at Champion's shell, to form, if possible, an opinion about him.

At the first glance one would imagine one's self in the house of a country squire.

Over the fireplace hung half a dozen hunting-guns, and on the opposite wall were powder-flasks, game-bags, and other such trophies.

A desk, however, covered with carefully arranged papers, showed at once that Champion was not the man to sacrifice business for pleasure.

In this room, which was half study, half parlor, everything was in its proper place. The chairs were symmetrically arranged against the walls.

Hercules Champion was a man who loved order, but that did not prevent him from sacrificing his pleasures to the demands of business. He knew that one must not run into extremes. *In medio stat virtus* (in the middle lies virtue) says the sage. Therefore, nothing should be overdone—not even virtue.

Champion really was what could be called a sage.

Still young, he also had the faults of youth. After a long and fatiguing hunt, he liked to drink a bottle of wine and hear a good joke.

When at work, however, Champion was the cold and passionless being called a business man, and the finest bottle of Margaux or the most rapturous smile could not have induced him to decrease his price a penny.

His personal appearance was that of a strong, well-built man of thirty. He had full red cheeks and black side-whiskers.

His smile was not a wicked one, and if he desired he could speak in a very cordial tone.

The face, at first glance, did not make a bad impression, but his eyes had a wicked look.

You can paint nose, mouth and forehead, but not the look.

In a word, Champion was a man who played the part of a generous, whole-souled fellow, and every one knows that such scoundrels are the most dangerous.

Yet, Hercules Champion, like those great actors who have played their parts so long that they unconsciously act them in private life, had, in the course of time, im-

bued a portion of the character he had at first only assumed.

Inwardly a coward, he yet possessed a certain amount of energy which replaced his lack of courage.

Every one knows Dr. Toinon. Every one has already met this feeble nature, ready to do good or evil as necessity suggests, afraid of the consequences of crime, yet committing it because too weak to resist bad influences. He neither had great vices nor great virtues.

People generally say of such men, "He is a good fellow!" But if we are in need of a real friend, we do not knock at their door.

Dr. Toinon was forty years old. Bald in front, he covered it up with his long black hair and affected a dandyish behavior. Women had almost made him fashionable, for he dressed well, and always had good horses.

Jean Baptiste Matifay, broker, born in Perigord, was a more serious opponent, though his personal appearance was not at all terrible.

He looked prematurely old with his parched face, on which not a trace of a beard could be seen. His voice was thin and quaking, and his hair of so light a blonde that it almost looked white.

His arms and legs were thin, his breast narrow and sunken, and his eyes winked continually. He heard badly, had a disagreeable Perigordian accent and stammered.

Such was Matifay.

Champion, as we have said, replaced courage by energy.

He did not deny Matifay's statement, but exclaimed:

"That is true enough. But what does it matter?"

"Oh, Champion!" said Matifay, in a whining voice,

"I would not have expected it of you. Are we not schoolmates and boyhood comrades? With our help—and without us you cannot do anything—you will pocket one million two hundred and fifty thousand francs, and you offer us twenty thousand! Really one does not know whom to trust any more."

The doctor raised his hands to heaven, and repeated, like one in a dream:

"One million two hundred and fifty thousand francs! One million two hundred and fifty thousand francs!"

"Come, Toinon, come! We will show this ungrateful man that we still possess some honor, and will not consent to be paid like lackeys. We shall see what he can do if he has not us any more."

"But what do you wish?" cried Champion, losing his head.

"Nothing!" replied Matifay, with dignity.

"Tell me your conditions, then we can discuss them."

"I believe you are beginning to get sensible," replied Matifay. As he said this, he dipped his finger again in the glass, drew an up and down line over the addition, and murmured: "Three into one won't go: three into twelve makes four; three into five makes one and two over; three into twenty makes six and two over; six more leaves two more. According to this, each of us is entitled to four hundred and sixteen thousand six hundred and sixty francs. We are generous, though, are we not, Toinon? We do not haggle, as that fellow there, and will be satisfied with four hundred thousand francs."

"Four hundred thousand kicks!" exclaimed Hercules, angered at Matifay's calmness. "If you refuse to take twenty thousand, the loss is your own. Twenty thousand francs is a nice sum!"

"That was a sage remark. Yes, twenty thousand francs is a nice sum, but not as nice as four hundred thousand."

"Well, if you do not wish to take it, say so," replied Champion, briefly. "I can attend to it myself then."

"Even though," replied Matifay in a gentle voice, "we do our business alone too, and make a certain exile, who is concealed in the neighborhood, our accomplice."

Champion let his head hang down. He was conquered.

Yet he could not help uttering a cry which can only be compared to the heartrending sob of a mother whose child has been torn from her.

"These scoundrels wish to ruin me!" he exclaimed.

"We wish to ruin you?" repeated Matifay, shrugging his shoulders. "How can you say such a thing! We only wish to enrich ourselves. You know very well that the doctor and I are far too sensible to ask you for the four hundred thousand francs cash down. That would be foolish and impertinent. No matter how well we do the job, there will always be something nasty about it, and we would betray ourselves if we were to allow people to perceive that we took an interest in the doings which are to happen here to-night. The doctor, for instance, has come to Noirmont to-night merely in his capacity as a physician, and I am here to demand payment of a protested note. We both have thus a plausible excuse. This would not be the case if people knew that we desire to have a third part of the Countess Helene's legacy. Do not fear, therefore, that we shall demand our just rights in the near future."

"But what do you demand now? I have asked you now for the third time!"

"Oh! almost nothing. Make a statement that each one of us is interested in your business with the sum of four hundred thousand francs. The doctor will come out all right that way, for we will pay him higher interest than he could get any place else. And we shall not lose anything either," continued Matifay as he winked at Champion, "for with your shrewdness and my business talents we will earn millions."

"Good: then so let it be!" said Champion, with a sigh, as he thought to himself: "It will be bad indeed if I don't find an opportunity to rid myself of these two bloodsuckers."

"Then you will sign the contracts?" asked Matifay, as he took two stamped papers out of his pockets. "They are legally correct, and the date has been left open. At present you are only the heir apparent."

Champion drew near to the lamp to read the contracts, and Matifay thought to himself, as he observed him:

"The stupid fool! He does not suspect that I will turn him about as soon as the time suits me like the finger of an old glove. Sign away, old boy! We shall earn the million together. When we shall have pulled the chestnuts out of the fire, we shall see who will eat them."

Toinon held his nose in his glass and did not think at all. Nothing but greed shone in his eyes, and he unconsciously muttered to himself:

"One million two hundred and fifty thousand francs!"

CHAPTER IV

THE FOURTH LIGHT

LET us now enter the room opening onto the garden. It is a very large apartment, all the windows of which, with the exception of one, are closed from the inside by blinds. Broad damask curtains form the drapery of the window and the bed.

In this bed a woman lies. Her blonde head rests upon a pillow trimmed with lace.

She is sleeping, and probably has a good dream, for from her half-opened lips two names fall one after the other: "George!—Octave! George!—Octave!"

These two names, united in her dream, proved her innocence. She is no doubt speaking with the friend she has lost, and of him who is in deadly danger to-day, and a high power bids her hope, for she is smiling.

Yes, it is a smile, a gentle, sweet smile, which plays about the red lips of the Countess Helene. Let us leave her buried in this dream which makes her smile again, after her eyes have only known tears for so long a time.

How different it used to be!

This used-to-be means for poor Helene hardly five years before, but how distant it seems to her.

Formerly she used to romp about her father's house,

a laughing, merry child. The good, dear child was spoiled by her dead father.

Yet, though her every wish and caprice were gratified, the pureness and goodness of her heart remained untainted.

The workmen of her father's factory knew and loved her.

Even the poorest and most unfortunate looked with pleasure upon her.

One day a handsome young man came to the factory.

He was hardly twenty-five years of age, yet had the earnestness and gravity of thirty.

At night around the dinner-table, Helene heard, from her father's conversation with the stranger, that the latter had come to study the manufacturing branch at Monsieur Roumieux's place.

Young girls are curious. Helene wished to know what made this young man so sorrowful and earnest. She was a little frightened in his presence, although her heart was drawn toward him.

It was not long before she knew Count George's secret.

He had left two graves behind him in the land of exile—those of his father and his mother. That was the cause of his sorrowful look.

Although so young, he had a name and a fortune to restore. That was the cause of his earnestness.

Helene's good little heart was filled with commiseration, which soon turned into love, and still Count George instilled her with a certain degree of fear. What she felt was not the fresh love of a sixteen-year-old girl—the love which expands the breast, inflames the look, and learns to make the lips smile.

No; when she thought of her handsome George she was grave. Her eyes were cast down, and her heart was drawn together as if she divined some misfortune.

The sternness of the young count hurt her youthful spirit, and dampened the fire of her enthusiasm. In his presence she dared not be a child any more. She loved him as one loves a stern father—with tenderness mingled with fear.

Helene, though, was still very young. She believed that the feeling she felt was what is called love.

Six months after George's arrival she was one day very happy, for on that day she saw him smile for the first time.

In the neighborhood an epidemic reigned. Monsieur Roumieux's best workman had perished the day before, and his wife was about to follow him.

The poor parents left a little five-year-old girl behind them. Helene knocked at the door of her father's study while the latter was engaged in conversation with George.

She was trembling all over, for Monsieur Roumieux had given orders not to be disturbed when he was busy.

Helene timidly related to him the misfortune which had overtaken the poor family and begged for permission to adopt the little orphaned Rosa.

This prayer seemed to her to be such a bold one, that she hardly dared to raise her eyes, to see the effect her words had produced. When she cast a stealthy glance at her father, she saw that his eyes were filled with tears. On George's lips she saw a soft and gentle smile.

We need hardly say that her prayer was granted.

That afternoon she was for a moment alone with George. He grasped her hand and murmured:

"How good you are!"

His eyes however said:

"How pretty you are!"

It was a day of joy in the midst of her sorrow when Helene, likewise an orphan, left her father's house to find a second home in Noirmont.

The old residence had been gayly decorated to receive her.

Helene looked upon her husband as an almost divine being; when she saw his black eyebrows knit she trembled with fear, and every one of his wishes was for her sacred law.

She believed more and more that this was the way one loves.

One day Octave came.

Octave resembled his brother about as much as the cheeriness of youth does the sternness of a man who has suffered.

Octave was as handsome as George and just as young as Helene.

He had never known his father or his mother, and his past therefore did not make him melancholy. He had taken the easiest part of life and left his elder brother the other part.

And in Helene's dream the names of George and Octave were united.

What remained now to Helene of all that she had loved? Her father was dead, George was dead, and a price had been set on Octave's head. She herself felt an indefinable danger hovering above her and the dear child she carried under her heart.

Her sleep, which until then had been tranquil, was

suddenly disturbed by nervous twitches and hollow groans.

The door softly turned on its hinges.

Shivering and frightened, the countess raised herself half up in bed, and was hardly able to stammer forth the question:

"Who is there?"

"It is I, madame," replied Rosa's gentle voice.

Helene breathed more freely, and laid her head again on the snow-white pillow.

"It is you, Rosa," she then said; "come here, dear child. I don't know why it is, but I am afraid to stay in this gloomy room alone. Come here, and do not go away again."

"I am not alone, though," replied Rosa, hesitating.

"Not alone!"

With these words Helene raised herself again and wished to cry out:

"Octave!"

But the young man had already dropped on his knees at her bedside and seized the thin white hand Helene held toward him.

For a moment they were both silent, then Helene said:

"Octave, Octave, is it really you?"

"Yes, yes, Helene; it is I."

Helene gently withdrew her hand from that of the young man and asked:

"Why are you here again?"

"Why am I here again, Helene? Because we must obey the orders of the dying, and because a child is going to be born wnose father I should be."

"Whose father you should be?" repeated the countess.

"Yes, and I shall at least not prove unfaithful to this trust. Oh!" he added sorrowfully, "I no longer count upon a happiness which I at one time desired. Believe me, Helene, it is not an egotistical love which leads me here. No, the attitude of my brother makes it our duty not to make any use of it. If we did I should look upon it as a crime. My love is at an end, Helene. It is dead, without ever having lived, and I have buried it with my own hands in the innermost corner of my heart. Yet there is happiness in store for us. We will both live for the innocent child which the generous deceased intrusted to us. We will make a great and noble man out of him like his father, or a woman as pure and lovely as her mother. This innocent heart will be, as it were, the place of refuge for our love. You will be my wife, because George wished it so, but you will nevertheless still remain his widow and I your brother."

While Octave was speaking, Helene had raised herself upright. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes glistened, and an indescribable smile pervaded her mouth.

"Yes," she said, "it is right, Octave. Yes, you are just as I thought you, just as I loved you, just as I love you still. Yes, we will be worthy of your brother. In his name, I accept your proposition, and if, as I believe, his soul rests with us, hears us, and reads our hearts, then I am convinced it will not see anything therein which is not pure and worthy of him."

Her hand unconsciously glided into Octave's, and she did not resist when he pressed a pious kiss upon it.

He wished to speak again, but she was ahead of him as she said:

"Be silent! I am happy. I seem to see him, observing and blessing us. Let me pray!"

For five minutes nothing was heard in the room but the silent murmur of prayer.

Octave, who was still on his knees, held Helene's hand in his. Suddenly he felt it tremble.

The sound of a horse's hoofs was heard on the pavement outside.

It was Dr. Toinon who was making his official entry.

A few minutes later a soft knock was heard at the door.

"Who is there?" asked Rosa.

"I, Hercules!" replied Champion's voice.

Octave himself opened the door.

"You here!" cried Champion, "I feared so. Quick, quick! We have not a minute to lose. I do not know how the police got wind of it. They are on your track. How are you going to save yourself?"

Hercules appeared to be in despair, tore out his hair, and cried incessantly:

"What a misfortune! What a misfortune!"

"Calm yourself, my dear Hercules!" said Octave, laughing. "You must not lose your senses about so trivial a matter. This is not the first time, thank God! that I have escaped from these men, who are merely doing their duty. The Duchess of Berry braved far worse dangers before she was captured in Nantes behind the fireplace. Only give me a good horse and I shall be satisfied."

He then turned to the frightened Helene, and in a more serious tone added: "From to-day on I have new duties. The unhappy ending of our undertaking relieves

me of my responsibility toward my party comrades, and to-morrow I shall announce my submission to the king. The king will not demand the death of brave people who are no longer dangerous to him. Therefore calm yourself, Helene. I leave you under the protection of our only, our best friend. Before a month has passed I shall return, never to leave you again."

"Well, then, go," said Helene, with a deep sigh.

Although she told him to go, she still grasped his hand and held him back. Big silent tears veiled her glance, and in spite of the young man's trusting words she could not help thinking: "Ah, if he goes, I shall not see him again!"

"Quick, quick!" exclaimed Champion, who had hurried to the window; "the policemen must have been well posted. I think I hear the sound of their horses' hoofs on the country road. In five minutes they will be here."

Octave tore his hand from Helene's grasp, and rushed, without once looking round, into the corridor. Would he have had the courage to go if he had seen the outstretched arms of the poor deserted woman, and heard her pale lips murmur: "I shall not see him again!"

Champion had followed him. They met again in the midst of a group which had possession of the middle courtyard.

Dr. Toinon was giving instructions to the stable-boys, who were already busy rubbing his horse's legs.

"That is right," cried Champion; "get on to this fine animal, Octave, and gallop off. Do not take the main road. We had no time to cover the feet of your horse with cloths, and, as the sound of the hoofs would betray you, ride through the moor. In the first place, the road

is the shortest; and, secondly, the policemen will not venture to follow you in that direction with their heavy horses. If I were in your place, I would conceal myself for a time in the farmhouse of Trompardiere. Brave people live there who will not betray you. If you are once in safety do not show yourself any more, but let your friends manage for you. Send us a peasant boy to-morrow, though, to calm poor Helene. He can bring you back news from here."

While Champion was speaking, he arranged the saddle and reins.

Octave sprang into the saddle, and bent down to offer his hand to his cousin for the last time.

"I thank you, Hercules," he said, "you are a good fellow, and I leave entirely tranquil in mind, because I know I have left Helene under your protection."

"No compliments," said Champion. "We have no time for them. I shall do everything I can; only think of yourself."

He made a sign, and the stable-boy opened the door of the courtyard.

Octave rode off at a gallop.

Toinon looked on at the whole scene as if in a dream.

"But, my horse!" he said, when he had finally recovered his speech, "where are you sending it to? Who will return it to me?"

"It will not be returned to you," replied Hercules, briefly, "but you will be paid for it, and I only wish that you could sell one every day as dearly."

Then, after the stable-boy had closed the door of the courtyard with the same care as he had opened it, Champion added, in a loud tone: "You will find fire and a

light in my room, my dear doctor; I will prepare our poor invalid for your visit."

In Hercules Champion's room Matifay was busy with a work which did not harmonize with his peaceful and gentle nature. He had taken a splendid double-barrelled gun from the wall, and took out the small duck-shot.

As soon as he had laid the same upon a piece of paper, he loaded each of the barrels with a bullet, and put on the caps. Near him stood a man who, to judge from his clothes, looked like a workman, who watched the operation with the greatest interest.

If one looked more carefully at him, one would have recognized in him the spy of whom we formerly spoke.

When Matifay was done, he gave the gun to the workman and said:

"You understood me, Limaille? You were caught in the act, my boy, and I believe you will not hesitate much longer about the choice—the galleys or a large sum of money!"

"It's all right," replied Limaille, growling. "You don't need to threaten."

"He will ride through the moor!" said Matifay, simply.

CHAPTER V

LOVE AND MISFORTUNE

CHAMPION, as he had told Dr. Toinon, had gone up to Helene's room again.

The latter was waiting for him with feverish impatience, and he had to repeat twice to her that Octave had gone, and was probably out of danger.

Only after this double assurance did she consent to become calm.

When her regular breathing denoted that she had fallen asleep, Champion made a sign to Rosa to noiselessly leave the room, and conducted her to the door.

"Sleep a few hours, dear child," he said to her, "you are, no doubt, tired. Your mistress will soon need you. As soon as the time arrives, we shall call you. Until then, I shall watch in your place."

Rosa wished to object, but he pushed her outside.

She did not dare to re-enter; but as she began to get suspicious, she determined to stay outside in the corridor.

Yet she heard nothing, and as she laughed at herself for having such chimerical fears, she went to her little room and threw herself on her bed.

She had spent three nights at her mistress's bedside. Her devotion was greater than her strength. She felt

entirely exhausted, and her neat little head had hardly touched the soft pillow before she was already fast asleep.

Hercules, who for the first time on this terrible day seemed to be uneasy, had seated himself in a large rocking-chair near the fireside.

He kept his eyes on the burning logs, and was meditating.

Three times he arose and approached the bed, three times, though, he let the curtains fall again, and three times he seated himself again in his chair.

Ah! everything he had done up till now was nothing. The interview would perhaps free him from the annoying companionship in crime of the doctor and Matifay.

Yet he felt a certain fear when he thought of the interview. He feared Helene's honest glance and her indignation, as soon as she should hear what he had to say—he feared her despair and her tears.

And yet he wished to defy these tears and this despair.

It must be! For half an hour Champion had said to himself, "It must be," and yet he dared not.

At length he walked with firm steps to the bed, and with a quick movement threw back the curtains.

Helene was sleeping.

Champion's outstretched hand sank down again, and, standing at the head of the bed, he gloomily looked about him.

What lay in the peculiar look which he directed on the sleeping woman. Love or hatred? Who could say? Perhaps both.

Helene moved slightly, and slowly opened her eyes.

When she saw the two burning eyes bending over her she could not suppress a slight scream.

She soon recognized Champion, and immediately began to smile.

"Ah, is it you, Hercules?"

"Helene!" replied Champion, in a low voice, "listen to what I have to say, and consider your decision well, for on it our fate will depend."

"What do you wish? What do you say?" cried the young woman, who was really frightened now. "Has Octave—"

"It is not about Octave," replied Champion, briefly, "it is about you and me."

"About you? About me?"

"Why should I beat about the bush?" cried Champion. "I love you, Helene."

"You love me? You?"

Pale as death, she recoiled from her relative, and in affright she held out both her hands.

"I love you!" replied Champion, and then tranquilly added: "I have come to talk over the conditions of our marriage."

"Our marriage!"

Really Champion must have lost his senses. The countess almost felt like laughing. Her relative no doubt must have the nervous fever.

Fortunately Dr. Toinon was in Noirmont.

All these thoughts rushed simultaneously through Helene's brain. But when she thought that she was alone in the room with a lunatic she began to tremble again, and murmured in a caressing tone:

"We shall see—we shall see, dear Hercules."

Champion divined her thoughts, and commenced to laugh. He then drew a chair near the bed, and calmly seated himself.

"You now know," he continued, "the subject of our interview, and I hope that you understand the causes which have forced me to take this step. Do not look at me like that! I assure you I am perfectly sane. I told you, Helene, and I tell it to you again, I love you. Oh! entirely to myself! You must acknowledge yourself that up to to-day my passion was timid, respectful, and not at all bold or forward. George stood between us, and I kept silent. He is dead, and I speak."

Helene opened her lips to reply.

Champion signified to her to be silent, and continued:

"I would impress upon your mind, Helene, that outside of the question of love, this marriage would be the shrewdest thing. You are the only heiress of your husband, Helene, are you not?"

The countess curled her lips contemptuously. She believed she understood his object now.

Champion saw the smile, but appeared to pay no attention to it.

"The legacy is not as big as you believe, Helene," he continued, "and ruin stares you in the face if a smart, able man does not take hold of the iron works. This miracle can only be performed by me."

"That means," replied Helene, ironically, "that you offer me an industrial combination. But why do you speak of your timid love then? Do you do it from politeness or narrow-mindedness?"

Even though one is a Hercules Champion, there are certain words which, when spoken in a certain way by a woman, cut to the quick the vanity of the man.

Hercules buried his nails deep into the cushions of the

chair, but not a muscle of his face twitched, and in the same firm voice he continued:

"Let us speak no more of my love, and consider it merely as—"

"Greed, perhaps?" interrupted Helene, contemptuously.

"Yes, greed," repeated Champion. "It is greed, then, which actuates me. The wealth of the Count of Rancogne tempts me; I must have it. On that point we are united. But that is just the reason why you must marry me. Yes, you must!"

Hercules warmed as he went along, and became intoxicated with the sound of his own voice.

"Yes," he continued, "you know very little of me, if you believe that your resistance will be an obstacle for me. We resolved not to speak any more of our love, Helene. Yet I must speak of it again. You must be informed of what I have done to conquer you; then you will be able to guess what I am capable of doing.

"You probably remember what I was when I first came here to humbly ask for a home. I was a poor devil, badly dressed, awkward, and ridiculous. Every one was good to me, I confess, and I was immediately placed in the ranks of your—servants.

"Who forced you to take me in? No one. You were almost too good to me. I had the right to sit at your table—although away at the bottom—and eat the remnants of your dishes. You permitted me to assist at the unfolding of your luxury in the capacity of a hungry observer. The handsome Octave condescended to joke with me, and the noble, heroic George had the kindness to throw the burden of his business on to my weak shoulders.

"What reason had I to complain? On the contrary, I owed you a debt of gratitude; and after I had worked like a horse the whole day to make you rich, I ought to have been thankful for the remnants of your table.

"But, unfortunately, what was offered me did not satisfy me. I have a good appetite. I belong to the category of persons who when they get half a loaf want the whole. No sooner had I entered your house than I said to myself: 'Noirmont must be mine!' When I saw you, Helene, I said to myself: 'This woman must be mine!' I say this now, too, and will make it a reality."

The young widow, dazed with horror and fear, covered her face with the silk coverlet as she listened to this cynical confession.

"That was the aim," continued Champion, after a pause; "the means I used to succeed were as follows: I dared not think of possessing the iron works while they were in a prosperous condition. The dream was too bold a one for my powers, but if I could not raise myself up to the possession, yet I could, in lowering it to my level, realize my dream in the course of time.

"As soon as the plan was formed, I did everything in my power to carry it through.

"What a work! In the first place, I had to win George's affection, and then his confidence. Later on, when his sickness put everything in my hands, I made false sales and did other such things. Everything I did was done without speaking, without writing, so as not to compromise me. Have you ever seen me otherwise than smiling?

"My insignificance, however, was my salvation. My plan had to be so constructed that no one would think

of suspecting and accusing me, and that if any one did so, I could answer: 'What interest could I have in the matter?'

"In this way my undertaking succeeded. George died without ever having suspected that the misfortunes he had lately in his business were brought about by me, and to-day the iron works of Noirmont are on the verge of bankruptcy. They can only be saved by the same person who brought about their ruin."

Champion said all this in a calm tone. He revenged himself now for his long silence. The fear and horror of the countess pleased him.

He gloated over her weakness.

After he had observed Helene for some time, he continued:

"All this, however, was of no account. The purchasing price for the factory, even though the iron works had run down, was still beyond my means. But even if I had the money, this purchase would have aroused suspicion and thrown a light upon my doings. Therefore to become the possessor of Noirmont I must be the legitimate heir, and this can only be done in one way, and that is by marrying you. The artificial ruin of the establishment had only one purpose; namely, that on the day you were free I could force you to consent to be my wife. Therefore choose!"

"I have already chosen," murmured the countess.

This interruption was, however, not noticed by Champion. He did not seem to have heard it, and continued:

"It is a question now of the simultaneous satisfaction of my ambition and my love. You doubt the last, Helene? I swear to you, though, that it is sincere, and fills my

whole heart, even though to judge from my words it resembles hate.

"Ah! if you had wished, if you had known. There were moments when you could have saved me and yourself, and it only needed a single glance.

"If I had known that my grief caused you to suffer, and that you did not despise it, I would never have planned the terrible work which will be carried out to-night. But you were proud! You did not appear to think it possible that I could suffer.

"Are common people, such as I, even capable of loving? I was a nullity in your eyes, Helene. What is a Champion? I swore to myself that I would, one day, show you that Champion is something.

"I was never jealous of Count George. You did not love him and never loved him. You loved his brother though, and you have no idea what tortures you have made me undergo. You do not know how often I spied upon you, in the garden, in the parlor, when you imagined you were alone. Up till then I had worked for your husband. To work for the other was impossible. I was indignant at fate and I conquered it!"

"If you have loved me, Hercules," replied the countess in a gentle voice, "if you love me still, then why do you torture me so? Go, Hercules; I know the torture of hopeless love, for I have felt it as well as you. Although you have done me a great deal of harm, I forgive you nevertheless. Become again what you should always have been —my friend. If the ruin you have brought about cannot be made good again, I shall submit to it; but if there should be another means let us take advantage of it."

Helene paused. Champion remained silent, and then she continued:

"You are hunting two chimeras, Hercules—love and wealth. I cannot give you love, because my heart is dead. Wealth you can still attain if that will console you. If you had not spoken to me to-day you would have saved us all a great deal of trouble, for it was my intention to intrust the whole management of Noirmont in your hands, and give you half of the net profits. And if you wish," she added after a few seconds, as she offered him her small white hand, "if you wish, it is still my desire."

"What!" cried Hercules; "then you consent?"

Helene looked proudly at him, and said:

"You have misunderstood me, Monsieur Champion. My husband is dead, and his widow will never change his name for that of a forger and thief. You are a good comedian. You moved me. I had already resolved to forget and forgive everything; but now you prove to me that you are more wicked than I thought. Go! The Countess of Rancogne would rather bear poverty and misery than to have you another minute under her roof."

Champion stood for a moment crushed and annihilated. Big drops of perspiration ran down his forehead, and twice he attempted to speak but could not.

At length he murmured in a hollow voice:

"Two years ago your pity was good, Helene. At that time you could have made me your slave. To-day it is too late. I am bad, incurably bad. Love is my misfortune. I have suffered too much, and I must revenge myself. Helene, you must be my wife—either voluntarily or by force.

"Never!"

"You must be my wife, because I have done too much already to stop now."

"You are a monster!"

"Well, then, you will become the wife of a monster. A little while ago I asked you to choose between poverty and riches; now I say to you, choose between honor and dishonor."

"It would be dishonor for me to listen to your threats."

"No," replied Champion, calmly; "dishonor means for you in this case either the galleys or the guillotine."

"Guillotine! Galleys! I am—"

"Well, are not poisoners sent to the guillotine or to the galleys? Before four weeks have passed, if I so desire, you will be indicted for the poisoning of your husband, the Count of Rancogne!"

CHAPTER VI

WHAT CAN BE SEEN THROUGH A SHUTTER

JOSEPH knelt upon the floor at the bedside of old Biasson, and read the prayers for the dying. The prayer-book was a present from Rosa. The poor boy's heart is heavy, and tears are in his eyes. If he loses Biasson, he loses one of the few persons who ever showed him any affection.

When old Jeanisson, who had brought him into the service of Count George, died, who had treated him, so to speak, as his own son? The old man was smarter than was thought, and had taught Joseph reading, writing and other things.

Joseph thought of all this, and was now reading the prayers for the dead.

The door opened noiselessly, and Rosa's pretty face looked in.

The poor little thing was in a tremble, and greatly excited.

"Ah, my God!" she cried, as she sunk upon the block of wood upon which Joseph had been sitting before, "what is going on to-night at Noirmont?"

In the courtyard Noireau, the dog, still kept up his dismal howling.

Joseph closed his prayer-book.

"For God's sake, Rosa, what ails you?" he asked.

"Ah, I am frightened!" she replied, "danger is hovering in the air. Listen how Noireau is howling!"

"People say that is always the case in a house where a Christian dies," said Joseph, as he motioned with his eyes toward the bedside of the dying man.

"Father Biasson has lived his time," murmured Rosa; "the good countess, though, is still so young, so pretty and so genial! Ah, I had a bad dream. I was lying dressed upon my bed, when I suddenly heard a cry. It sounded as if it came from the countess's room, and I quickly sprang off the bed and wanted to enter her room. The door was locked from the inside, and yet I knew positively I had seen the keys in the door. I listened, but only heard the whispering of two voices—that of the countess and Monsieur Champion. That of the countess seemed to be imploring, the other commanding. I began to get frightened, and ran here."

"If we climb on the garden wall we could perhaps see into the room," murmured Joseph, pensively.

"Yes, you are right, Joseph," cried Rosa. "Go there! Do not lose any time! See what is going on in the room, and if it should be necessary we can burst in the door."

Joseph hurried to the door; just as he was about to cross the threshold his glance turned toward the couch on which the dying man lay.

Rosa understood this silent look at once.

She knelt on the same spot Joseph had just left, opened the prayer-book where he had left off, and continued to read further.

"Now I can go!" cried Joseph, as he hurried out into

the night. In the countess's room the conversation between her and Champion still continued.

The threat with which he expected to frighten her failed of its purpose. How could Helene be accused of poisoning her husband? She merely laughed, shrugged her shoulders, and said:

"Champion, you are out of your mind."

"Not at all, my pretty lady! Laugh as much as you please! The mine is laid, and a wink from me will explode it. Of course, I shall not be so foolish as to set fire to the fuse myself. On the contrary, Helene, I shall defend you; I will cry and rage. But the proofs will be so numerous that they alone will be sufficient to convict you."

"The proofs!" cried Helene, indignantly. "What proofs? The proofs that I have poisoned George? Either you have lost your senses, or I have."

"Neither of us have lost our senses," replied Champion; "and you know very well that you have only to say one word to make everything good again. The trap which has been set for you, my pigeon, is too narrow for you to escape! Tell any one you wish the story of our interview to-night; not a soul will believe you. However, I shall be the last person to turn from you."

"Yes, yes, you will continue your hypocrisy to the end. Now that I know you, I believe you. But the proofs, the proofs!"

"One of them, that the Count of Rancogne was poisoned, will be easy to establish, for that was really the case."

"Then it was you that poisoned him?"

"That is a matter for the courts to decide. Who has

benefited by the crime? Only you, the heiress, whom this death has united with her lover. What does Hercules Champion gain by this death? Nothing. He loses his place, that's all."

"But every one knows that I was devoted to my husband—"

"But what will be thought of this devotion when it will be shown that a day after Count George's death his ungrateful brother braved the dangers of exile to return here to renew his adulterous vows. You alone nursed your husband during his long illness. Outside of you and your faithful Rosa, no one approached his bed, and this man was poisoned. The chemists will prove this. Poison will be found everywhere—in the powdered sugar with which you sweetened his tea, in the secret drawers of your bureau, even in the lining of your clothes. Do you want to know where you got this poison? I will tell you."

Helene looked at the scoundrel with horror, unable to say a word.

"You got the poison secretly one day from the house apothecary where you bound the wound of a workman named Francois Limaille, whose finger had been smashed by a hammer. This man saw you drop half a package of white powder in a box. The package and box will be found again. Are those proofs or not? Do you want others? A few months later I wished to discharge Francois Limaille, but in consequence of your intervention I kept him. You only acted as his advocate because he had promised you that he would say nothing to any one about the white powder."

"That is a miserable lie," hissed Helene.

"The man will swear to it. You demanded proofs—are

these none? The proofs of your crime surround you from all sides! Every witness who attempts to defend you—and I shall belong to this class—will only hurt your case. The facts are so combined that if any one defends you he becomes your most dangerous enemy."

Champion was silent for a moment and then continued:

"Rosa, for instance, is devoted to you and is convinced of your innocence, is she not? Well, what will she do, what will she say? Will she deny the *liaison* existing between you and Octave? Yes, she will do it, but in such an awkward way that it will be plainly seen that she is not telling the truth."

"Get the physician!" cried Helene, "the physician who treated George during his whole illness; he knows that I did not poison him."

"Yes, that is true; I forgot about the physician. Yes, the physician knows you did not poison George, for the physician knows everything. He will be one of your defenders. He will even go further than I; he will deny that there was any poisoning, and his learned colleagues from Paris will declare him to be an ignoramus. That is what you will gain by your physician."

This was more than the unhappy countess could bear. Without strength to resist any more, she sank back upon the pillows and began to sob bitterly.

Hercules Champion for a few moments looked at the flow of her tears and seemed to be affected by it.

"You know now, Helene, how terrible my weapons are," said Hercules Champion caressingly; "need I tell you that it is my purpose to make full use of them?"

Helene observed him with a timid look and seemed not to understand him. Encouraged by this silence, he continued:

"I have now shown you the depth of the abyss. You know the dangers which await you if you oppose my plans. For your own sake I beg you to give up this unequal struggle."

While he was speaking, he approached the countess and attempted to kiss her hand. She recoiled in terror and said:

"Enough of this! Complete your cowardly work! After having killed the husband, you can dishonor the wife and have her hanged, but spare her your pity and your hypocritical complaints! I do not wish to have anything to do with you. I only call you by the names you must have heard in your dreams: Robber, poisoner, murderer!"

He tried to force her to be silent, but she responded in a low voice:

"Murderer! Murderer!"

He did not know her any more. Mad with rage, he rushed upon Helene, who did not stop repeating:

"Murderer! Murderer!"

Suddenly her voice grew weaker, her eyes became enlarged, she stretched out her arms toward the window, and breathed more freely.

Champion heard her murmur rather than speak:

"Ah! We have been seen! We have been overheard! I am saved!"

She then sank back unconscious.

Champion turned around quickly and hurried toward the window.

He believed he saw two burning eyes looking through the window.

He tore open the window, bent out and looked about —no one was there.

Nothing could be heard but the monotonous dripping of the rain and the last roar of the storm.

He closed the window again, and strode toward the bed on which the countess lay.

"You have wished it thus, Helene," he murmured.

As soon as Joseph saw that the window was closed again, he crawled out of the boxwood bush in which he had hurriedly concealed himself.

He too was very pale, although he had only seen the countess's last gesture, and only heard the word "Murderer!"

Joseph was a brave fellow though. Hardly had he reached the end of the walk, than he stood still, turned about, climbed the wall again, and finally resolved at the first cry for help to jump into the room.

He only saw the countess in the room, which was perfectly quiet now. Hercules Champion was no longer there.

Joseph was not only brave but shrewd too. He immediately comprehended that Champion had left the room for the purpose, no doubt, of seeing from the outside what he could not see from within.

If he was captured by him he would be lost. He already heard the manager's careful tread in the centre of the building.

Joseph's plan was quickly made. He placed his hand on the window, and resolved in case of necessity to break it.

In consequence of a lucky accident, Champion in his excitement had not closed the window well and it opened at the first pressure. Joseph immediately swung himself on to the small stone sill, and from there sprang into the room.

He then closed the window again and waited.

It was not long before he saw a door in the basement open, and a man carrying a lantern step out, who was followed by a second man.

They were Champion and Matifay.

They seemed to be both following a trail in the sand, but without success, for they soon went away in the direction of the pond, and the dim light of their lantern disappeared behind a corner of the factory building.

Joseph now walked softly on his toes through the room, to gain the door. He already had his hand on the knob and was about to turn it, when a long-drawn sigh caused him to pause.

Helene had raised herself up in the bed and cried for help in a faint voice.

"Do not get frightened, madame," said Joseph, softly, "it is I, Joseph."

"You!" exclaimed the countess, "Heaven sends you to me. Save me, save us! Hurry after Octave, tell him a shameful trap has been laid for us; he should not try to hide himself any more, but step forth openly and defend his wife and child."

"If we still live, to-morrow, madame," replied Joseph in a firm voice, "Monsieur Octave will be with you."

"Oh, you are a brave boy! But hurry yourself! Who knows if it is not too late. Our enemies are monsters and capable of anything. They have poisoned my poor

George, and now say that I am the murderess. Hurry, Joseph! May Heaven lead you!"

With these words the countess offered the boy her hand. He grasped it to press it to his lips, but Helene withdrew it from him, and said:

"Poor boy! Perhaps you will die for us to-night—perhaps I shall not see Octave again. Bring him at least this token of remembrance from me."

And clasping the boy in her arms, she kissed him on the forehead.

CHAPTER VII

THE MOOR OF NOIRMONT

FIVE minutes later, Joseph put on a pair of tall rubber boots and told Rosa what he had just heard and seen.

Biasson was in the last agonies of death.

Suddenly a voice arose in the silence of the room and sang a melancholy ballad.

Rosa and Joseph raised up their blonde heads.

"The old man is dreaming," said Joseph.

"It is said that the dreams of the dying prophesy the future," replied Rosa, shuddering.

The voice was silent.

"You must keep your eyes open now, Rosa," continued Joseph, "the countess has now no one but you in the house who loves her; and who knows what her enemies will do before I overtake Monsieur Octave?"

Biasson's emaciated limbs nervously moved under the thin cover.

"Ha!" he groaned, aloud, "Rancogne is dying; Rancogne is dead!"

With these words he arose in his bed, his eyes rolled wildly about.

Suddenly they stood motionless and appeared to be

expiring. His limbs stretched out and the dying man sank back upon his couch.

Noireau the dog howled more dismally than ever.

Rosa had approached and tremblingly leaned on Joseph's shoulder.

"It is all over with him," murmured the little one at length.

"No, not yet," replied Joseph, "but it will not last very much longer. Poor Biasson! He loved me so much."

He wiped the tears from his eyes and added in a grave voice:

"Rosa, there are hours in one's life which count years. When this man is dead, Rancogne will only have two friends left—you and I. This morning I was still a child, but I am now a man. We are weak, dear Rosa, and the others are strong, yet I hope that we shall succeed in rescuing Monsieur Octave and the countess."

With these words Joseph gently drew away from Rosa, went to Biasson's couch and bent over and kissed him.

The old man looked at him with fixed eyes and tried in vain to stammer forth a few words.

Finally he pointed behind his pillow.

Joseph picked it up, and the old man nodded with his head, as if he wished to say:

"That is right."

Joseph then drew a purse from underneath the pillow, which contained twelve gold pieces. He laid it upon the bed, but the eyes of the dying man immediately glared so angrily that Joseph hurriedly took the purse away again.

"What shall I do with it, Father Biasson?"

The old man tried to reply, but could not.

"Is it for him?" asked Rosa.

"Yes, yes, yes," nodded the old man three times.

As Joseph still hesitated to take the purse, Biasson uttered such a commanding cry that the boy had to obey him.

In the meanwhile he still held Joseph's hand in his, and Rosa saw that he wished to still say something but could not.

"Do you want anything else, Father Biasson?" she asked.

"Yes," he nodded.

"Shall masses be read for you?"

The dying man nodded again, and then shook his head, as if he wished to say:

"That is not all I desire."

This time Joseph guessed what he wanted.

"Do you mean the treasure?" he asked.

Biasson passionately nodded assent.

"Have no fear, Father Biasson, I shall go."

"That is right," nodded the head.

"Before a week has passed it shall occur," added Joseph.

"No, no, no!"

"I should go sooner? To-morrow? To-day?"

Biasson's eyes seemed to exclaim:

"If you do not go to-day, I shall curse you."

Joseph understood the look, and pointing to the crucifix on the wall:

"As true as I am a Christian," he said, "I shall, as soon as I have overtaken Monsieur Octave, be on my way to Rancogne."

Biasson's hand, which held the boy's under the cover, let it go as if to say:

"It is time now that you get to work."

Joseph went noiselessly into the courtyard, glided along the wall, and then hurriedly strode toward the corner from where he usually climbed over the wall.

Champion and Matifay were also on the watch.

They had found tracks in the garden, and had become convinced that some one had overheard Champion.

The listener could not have escaped by way of the garden. He must have gone either through the courtyard or along the pond.

The former way was improbable, because all the gates and doors were locked.

And as for the latter way, the boat was still tied to a post, and was being watched by Dr. Toinon.

The spy, therefore, must still be concealed somewhere, either under a shed or in the servants' house.

"Our spy," said Matifay, "is no doubt one of the household, and as soon as it is daylight we shall have no trouble in finding out who it is. Should he be a stranger, he will try to get away as soon as possible, and it is impossible that we should not see him."

After he said this, he carefully locked all the doors which connected the garden with the courtyard.

Champion was placed as sentinel at the garden door and Dr. Toinon at the boat. Matifay undertook the watching at the courtyard.

While these measures were being taken, Joseph and Rosa were assisting at the scene already described, which took place about the bedside of the dying man.

Matifay was standing at his post of observation when the boy left the room, and plainly saw him climb on to the wall and disappear on the other side.

"This boy is quick," said Matifay to himself, "I cannot follow him by that way. Yet we must know where he is going and what he is doing."

He ran as quickly as he could to the next door, and untied Noireau, the dog, as he went by, taking him with him.

He counted on the dog to find the right trail.

When he came to the other side of the wall, he saw no one, but as soon as Noireau had smelled the trail the spy had left behind him in the soft earth he began to wag his tail with glee and spring about.

"Aha!" murmured Matifay delighted, "it seems our game is an acquaintance of yours, friend Noireau."

He followed the impulse of the dog and felt for the two loaded revolvers he carried in his pocket.

The man-hunt began.

As soon as Joseph was on the outside of the courtyard he ran as fast as he could, sprung over ponds and climbed over fences, to gain the road to Limoges as quickly as possible.

The night was dark, but Joseph knew the ground too well to be in any danger of losing himself.

A feverish fear took hold of him.

He thought of Biasson's prophetic words. He still believed he heard them. From time to time he paused for a few moments to wipe the perspiration from his brow. Then he raised his hands to Heaven and murmured:

"If I only come in time!"

In his fear, Joseph thought of little Rosa's words:

"The dead have a prophetic vision."

And quicker than ever Joseph ran over fields and meadows. At length he gave a sigh of relief.

He had arrived on the spot. On the other side of this last fence lay the country road, on the other side of the country road was the moor.

Just as he was about to climb over the fence he paused and ducked his head noiselessly.

The sound of horses' hoofs and the rattle of swords were heard along the country road.

They were policemen.

There were only two of them, the inspector and a private.

"Yes," said the inspector, "he has escaped us, and to tell the truth I am glad of it. This Chevalier de Rancogne is a brave young man and I would rather leave the job of capturing him to some one else."

"I think," said the other policeman, "that it would have been better for him if he had allowed himself to be taken. He would only have had to make a promise that he would not conspire against the government again, and then he would have been set free. The moor is perhaps less generous than the district-attorney."

"Yes," replied the inspector, "in a night like this God alone knows who will ever come out of it."

The policemen put spurs to their horses, the swords rattled louder, and the sound of the horses' hoofs was lost in the distance.

"Yes," thought Joseph, "Father Biasson was right. He took the road through the moor."

The brave boy was about to follow the road, when he felt a hot tongue on his face, and saw through the darkness a black form spring at him.

"Noireau!" he murmured, in amazement.

He then put his hand on the animal's neck, and added:

"He has torn himself loose. Perhaps it is better as it is. At night animals are shrewder than men, and this dog will find the way through the moor better than I."

Noireau began to growl.

"Quiet, old boy!" murmured Joseph, caressingly, "the hedges seem to have ears to-night."

A few feet distant from the group a careful voice exclaimed:

"Here, Noireau, here! Where is that confounded dog?"

"Aha!" thought Joseph, as he caressed the dog's head, "they are hunting for me!"

"Here, here!" repeated Matifay's voice.

"Come, Noireau!" said Joseph, softly, "we must get out of this and make no noise."

As noiselessly as rats the boy and the dog crawled along the wet grass, and soon reached the opposite side of the moor, from which they were only separated by the broad country road.

They could not cross this without being seen.

Joseph did not hesitate a minute.

"Come, Noireau, my good dog, come!" he exclaimed; "if we are once across, the devil himself won't dare to follow us!"

Quick as lightning he sprang across the road and into the moor.

Matifay, who stood in the centre of the road, saw the dog and the boy run past him, and wanted to hurry after them. When he saw them escape into the moor he paused again.

He pulled the pistol out of his pocket and aimed it at Joseph, but just as he was about to fire he heard the far-away echo of a horse's hoofs.

Matifay put his pistol again in his pocket. The policemen were not so far distant but what they would have heard the report of the pistol, and would no doubt have immediately galloped back.

Joseph had at first thought of opposing Matifay and calling for assistance.

Convinced now that Matifay would not dare to follow him on such dangerous ground, he paused as soon as he was out of reach of the pistol and began to prepare himself for his bold tramp. He cut off a large branch of a tree and made a stick out of it.

He then bent down, cut off a quantity of reeds and fastened them to his knees.

Noireau quietly sat beside him and watched these necessary preparations.

When they were finished he sprang in advance, as if he wished to take the part of leader.

Before Joseph followed the dog, he cast a last look around the country road.

Matifay was no longer there.

Noireau's desertion had explained to him the name of the mysterious spy whom he had pursued throughout the whole night.

Only Joseph could be this spy. Matifay did not doubt for a moment that the boy knew all, and if he went to the moor on such a night it was only because he wanted to inform Octave of the danger the Countess Helene was in.

If Octave found this out it would be all up with Matifay's hopes, and he and his accomplices were lost.

Octave must die at any price, and Joseph with him.

Matifay hurried as fast as his short legs could carry him.

He reckoned that in consequence of the difficulty of the road through the moor, and in spite of the circuitous route he took, he would reach the spot at least an hour before Joseph, and ten minutes earlier than Count Octave.

If Francois Limaille were once informed that instead of one victim, two must fall, then victory must be assured.

In the meantime, Joseph shook his head sorrowfully as he muttered to himself:

"The dead have a prophetic vision!"

CHAPTER VIII

NOIREAU HOWLS FOR THE LAST TIME

THE moor of Noirmont covers the whole base of a three-cornered valley, which is inclosed by woody heights.

Formerly this valley was probably the bed of an immense lake. It is now a meagre plain, covered by thin, almost grayish, grass. In winter, and especially after the long November and March rains, it was a hazardous undertaking to cross the moor.

Everywhere the slimy ground sank under foot, which left a deep hole behind, which immediately filled with clear water.

To find the safest way over the apparently innocent plain required instinct.

Animals understand far better than human beings how to avoid these dangers. It was wonderful with what freedom the horses of that neighborhood sprung about and gambolled over the moving prairie. It was just as wonderful to see Noireau walking in advance of his master as tranquil as if he were on the hard country road. Only sometimes he made a side spring, and Joseph always murmured:

"I thank you, Noireau."

The dog had saved his life each time.

This dangerous valley the Chevalier de Rancogne, who only knew it superficially, had to ride through, and at the very moment Joseph had entered it he had hardly covered a third of the way.

He, too, had trusted to his horse's instinct.

Five or six times he thought he heard a distant voice calling to him.

Who could it be calling him at this hour in this place?

It was Joseph's voice. If Octave had listened to it he would have been saved.

The sky had cleared. A few minutes more of patience and courage and Octave would be rescued. He said it to his horse, as if it could understand him.

Joseph knew the danger that was near at hand. About five hundred steps in front of him he saw a dark form. With all his strength he uttered a last shout.

Octave heard him this time, paused and listened. The same minute there was a flash of light, a report was heard, and the horse and its rider tumbled over.

Throwing off all prudence, Joseph hurried to the spot with Noireau.

He only saw a confused mass on the ground, sinking deeper and deeper into the mire. He tried to get to them, but could not, and had to stand still.

This saved his life in two ways.

On the edge of the moor Matifay pointed out the boy to the wretched Francois Limaille. Limaille immediately aimed at him, but, seeing that he was out of reach of the gun, he did not fire.

Noireau, the hardy animal, was no longer at its master's side. Quicker and lighter than his master, he had

nearly reached the black mire in which the Chevalier de Rancogne had sunk, and picked at the latter's black cloak which swam in the mud.

"Shoot down the dog!" exclaimed Matifay.

A second shot was fired, and Noireau, pierced through the heart, let go of the cloak and uttered a prolonged howl.

It was his last.

At this time the Countess Helene, at length confined, pressed her little daughter to her bosom.

The poor mother almost forgot the terrible scene which had taken place a few hours before in this same sleeping apartment.

Rosa was there, and had told her Joseph had gone away, and that he had sworn to bring Octave back with him. What could be done to her if Octave were there?

Champion entered the room.

Champion was hated by her.

But just now she felt so calm that she felt no fear.

Yet Champion was very pale, and his look was gloomy.

He made a sign to Rosa to leave the room.

The latter hesitatingly arose.

"Do not go away, Rosa," said the countess.

Rosa walked a few steps and remained standing in the embrasure of the window.

"Helene," said Champion, in a faint voice, "I pity you for the last time. For the last time I come to beg you to save yourself."

Helene smiled contemptuously, and said:

"Monsieur Champion, I pity you. I beg you, for your own sake, give up your dastardly plan. You always accuse me. Some one will be here who will know how to

defend me, and your accusation will be the signal of your own destruction."

Champion became pale.

A thought pursued him which he could not banish.

The thought became strengthened when Helene spoke of the mysterious avenger who was going to defend her.

Champion feared that Octave had not left the castle at all, but had listened at the window, and overheard their whole conversation.

Suddenly Rosa uttered a slight scream.

"Did you hear?"

A little while after another shot was heard in the distance.

Champion's face was wreathed in smiles; he breathed more freely, and, turning to the countess, he said:

"Octave de Rancogne is dead!"

Noireau howled for the last time, and in the cooperage Biasson uttered his last sigh.

This sigh was the echo of the words Champion had spoken.

Biasson's last words were:

"Rancogne is dead!"

The morning dawned and threw a rose-colored sheen upon the landscape. A thick fog rose over the whole moor, but even through this veil Joseph could see the two forms of Matifay and Limaille, just as they could see him standing motionless.

He remained thus until the last undulation of the moving ground was over. Only then he thought of his own rescue.

His situation was a dangerous one. He did not doubt

but what it was a point for the two murderers to destroy the only witness of their crime.

How could he escape them now that daylight had come?

Should he return to Noirmont?

He could not think of that.

In the first place the way was too far, and, secondly, he would give himself up to his enemies if he took that way.

There was only one way out of the difficulty.

He must attempt to gain the steep heights of Trompardiere.

To do this, however, he had to pass the worst part of the slimy plain, a place which was a deep morass.

Matifay and Limaille's plan was a very simple one. They thought they were sure of their prey.

The entrance to the moor was only practicable by way of the country road. No matter on what point Joseph would try to reach firm ground, he must necessarily fall into their hands.

Neither of them thought a moment of the third and very dangerous route which the courageous boy had chosen.

Without wasting a moment, he prepared to carry out his bold plan. Unfortunately, the first step showed him the impracticability of the same, for, had he not hurriedly drawn back, he would have sunk at the third step.

Limaille and Matifay looked at him.

"Let us leave him alone," said Limaille, laughing, "he saves us the trouble. You shall see, Monsieur Matifay, that he drowns without our moving a finger."

Suddenly, to the great astonishment of the two mur-

derers, Joseph took the road to the north and gradually disappeared in the fog.

"Where does he intend to go?" murmured Matifay, in astonishment.

A new thought had arisen in Joseph's fertile brain.

Since many years there lay on the spot which forms the frontier between the pond of Apreval and the moor, concealed beneath the reeds, a large boat which was not used any longer, and was allowed to rot in the mire.

Joseph thought of this boat and tried to tear off some of the loose planks.

It did not take long before Matifay saw him return with a board in each hand and select the spot where the morass seemed to be firmest.

He placed the board on it and carefully walked over this moving bridge. When he reached the end of it, he laid down the second board and took up the first.

With the help of this manipulation he must eventually reach the firm ground.

Limaille, with a loud curse, began to take the circuitous route around the pond of Apreval. If he hurried it would take him twenty minutes, and therefore he would probably reach it in time to meet Joseph as the latter came out of the moor.

"That is right, friend," cried Matifay to him. "Run, run! If you give the boy the other dose your fortune is made."

"Have no fear," replied Limaille, without stopping to pause. "I have very little wish to shorten myself by a head."

Matifay slung his gun across his shoulder and calmly walked in the direction of Noirmont.

Joseph, in the meantime, was already busy climbing the steep heights of Trompardiere. Arrived on the plateau, he turned to the left and went through the woods to the farmhouse which was to have served Count Octave as a place of refuge.

The farmer's son was of the same age as Joseph, and loaned him dry clothes.

After the exchange of clothing, Joseph went on his way again without resting a minute.

What could he do for the Countess Helene now that Octave was dead? What else but tell the authorities what he had seen?

What interest could this Matifay, who was known as an honest man, have in the death of Octave de Rancogne?

At this moment the sun rose, and Joseph thought of the solemn promise he had given to Biasson.

Under his feet lay the valley, overflowed by the fog, limitless as the sea, and the sun slowly rose out of it like a red-hot iron ball.

Joseph sorrowfully thought that deep in this abyss over which the sun now shone, deep in the black mire, lay the corpse of poor Octave.

He turned hurriedly about and walked along with big strides.

CHAPTER IX

THE SUBTERRANEAN CHAMBERS

JOSEPH walked steadily along the smooth country road.

"Forward, Joseph, forward! Find the treasure! Punish the murderers! Pay the countess for the kiss she pressed upon your brow! Forward!"

And Joseph walked on further and further. He left hills and valleys behind him, climbed over heights.

The fresh breezy air gives appetite. It was about eleven o'clock in the morning. Joseph was hungry, and felt like having some breakfast. He took out of the pocket of his borrowed coat a piece of black bread, and bit at it as he walked along.

But a man does not only want to eat, but drink too. When Joseph had eaten the last bit, he espied to the right of the country road a shady green bush. Water must be there.

Joseph descended into the little valley, and really found it watered by a rippling brook. He slaked his thirst and returned to the country road.

He had hardly walked two hundred steps when he heard some one calling him.

"Hello there, young man!"

Joseph looked about and saw a farm laborer, who held both his hands on the handle of his shovel.

"What do you want of me?" asked Joseph, politely.

"Nothing. I only wished to tell you that your comrade is looking for you. He asked me if I saw a boy passing here. I answered no, and then he turned about again."

"I know who it is," replied Joseph; "it was a big, strong man, with red hair and beard."

"Yes! He looked like Judas Iscariot."

"Well, if he should come back, tell him I have gone on in advance. He will soon overtake me."

"He must be pretty lively then, for you run like a weasel, young man!" cried the workman to the hurrying Joseph.

As soon as the latter had passed a sharp turn in the road, he cut across the fields.

He saw at once that he must be very prudent, for Limaille was on his track.

Toward five o'clock he arrived at Montbrun. Tired and exhausted he entered the first saloon, and ate a plate of soup, a piece of pork, and drank a bottle of wine.

He also bought a pound of tallow candles, some matches and black bread, for he could not tell what might happen to him. When he had finished his supper, it was already night. He took his cane in his hand, said good-night to the landlord and continued on his way.

Joseph turned to the left. It did not take long before he heard the roar of the Fardonere. He waded through it, wandered through the woods, and soon reached the entrance to the grottoes or cellars.

He paused on the threshold, looked around and listened. Not a sound could be heard, and nothing could be seen but the night. Convinced that his fears were groundless, and that Limaille had either lost his track or given up the pursuit, he resolutely entered the darkness. Bending down he followed a path about fifty feet long. He then turned to a side entrance and lighted one of his candles.

He now saw that there were three or four roads.

Joseph selected one at hazard, for he knew that they all led to the so-called "nave," which was visited and admired each summer by hundreds of tourists.

It seemed to Joseph as if he was in the centre of a darkness without limit. Only when the light he held in his hand flickered did he see in the distance huge stone pillars.

Joseph was in the nave.

In the centre of this space, which looked like the interior of a church, an enormous monolith stood.

It did not cause Joseph great trouble to find this wonderful phenomenon of the subterranean world. He fastened his light in one of the niches of the enormous mass, and taking Biasson's plan out of his pocket attentively studied it.

The centre of the plan formed the nave, or rather the pulpit, at the foot of which stood Joseph.

One of the points of the pillar was marked with an R, and the point opposite with an A. At this A several passage-ways met, and to point out the proper direction to take at each turning Biasson had made the letters N, C, O, G, N, E. At the bottom of the plan a small circular space was marked.

After Joseph had impressed all these signs on his mind, he put the paper in his coat again, held his light out in his hand, and slowly walked around the pulpit.

With what joy did he see an enormous R marked on the stone wall with a piece of coal!

This R was for him a visible proof of the existence of the treasure, a fact he had until then doubted.

In this first moment of triumph he forgot his whole exhaustion, and quickly walked to the edge of the nave, to examine the walls, as he had done those of the pulpit.

This was successful too. The A was marked on the exact place mentioned in the plan.

Unfortunately four galleries opened from this place which all met at one point.

Which was he to choose?

CHAPTER X

THE TREASURE

THE two letters R and A formed the two end points of an imaginary line.

Joseph therefore turned back, fastened a lighted candle under the R, the position of which he could thus see from a distance, returned with a second light in his hand to the entrance of the galleries, and did not hesitate now to follow the road, which in a certain sense was pointed out to him.

The gallery he entered was fairly large and almost horizontal.

At the expiration of a quarter of an hour he was opposite the third sign N. He was therefore on the right track.

The corridor made a sharp turn and led in a slanting direction. It also became more and more narrow, and here and there huge masses of stone lay about which threatened to block his way. Joseph had to climb over these blocks, which were as smooth as ice. The passage-way was now so narrow and low that he was continually forced to crawl on his hands and feet. He had to throw away a part of his light baggage. A piece of bread fell

out of his pocket and into the mud, but the courageous boy did not even bend down to pick it up.

It did not take long before he came to a new path which was marked with an O.

Here, too, Joseph left a light.

Confident now of ultimate success, the fatigued boy sat down on a stone to rest for a few minutes.

A peculiar numbness took hold of him. He did not sleep or even slumber; but he dreamed, and it seemed to him as if he were wandering in an unknown fabulous land.

He believed he heard from time to time a hollow sound echoed by the grotto.

He had the courage to shake off this numb feeling and continue on his way.

At the end of this corridor an N written on the wall indicated the first steps of a small spiral staircase.

It was a hazardous ascension.

Many of the steps were missing, and others were so loose that they quivered under his foot.

Arrived at the top of the stairs, he found a narrow antechamber with a low door, on which the arms of the Rancognes had been chiselled.

Above these arms the last letter marked by Biasson with coal was seen—the E, which together with the other letters formed the word R-A-N-C-O-G-N-E.

After so many trials, and finally successful, Joseph felt his strength fast waning. Faint and worn out he remained standing on the threshold of the door; behind was the treasure Biasson had spoken of.

Suppose some one else had been there before him? Suppose all his trouble and labor were fruitless?

One step more and all would be settled. This step, the easiest of all, was the one which took Joseph the longest time to make.

To his dismay, he found that to reach the narrow space before him he would have to step over a heap of human bones, mingled with broken swords and daggers, rusty guns and other weapons.

What tragedy had taken place in this mysterious place?

Probably the last defenders of Rancogne had escaped to this place during the siege of the castle and awaited an attack which never came.

Perhaps they locked themselves up here, and gave the preference to this death to death on the gallows for high treason.

Holding his light in his outstretched hand, Joseph examined as much as he could in the dim light the interior of the chamber.

It was a circular cellar, whose only exit appeared to be the one through which Joseph hesitated to enter.

This hesitation vanished at once when he perceived by the flickering candle the outlines of several chests.

They undoubtedly contained the treasure.

Joseph sprung over the human bones, and his trembling hands dipped in the gold of the house of Rancogne, which filled three chests to the brim.

In a fourth chest was a mass of jewels, pearls, diamonds, silverware, antique gold, and other things.

Now Joseph understood why the heroic defenders had rather suffered the pangs of starvation than deliver over to the enemies of their free belief the treasure intrusted to them.

Joseph knelt on the ground and prayed. Then he solemnly held up his hand and said:

"You have fought well for the honor of the house of Rancogne, and your sacrifice has not been in vain. You can see me take this money away without getting angry. Through this money Rancogne went under, through this money Rancogne will arise again."

He turned quickly about.

This time he had not deceived himself. He really heard the tread of steps and the heavy breathing of a man.

Joseph hurriedly grasped a heavy sword, for who but an enemy would look for him at this place and at this hour?

He did not long remain in doubt, for the door opened and Limaille entered. When he saw that Joseph was on his guard and stood there with a sword in one hand and a light in the other, he hurriedly withdrew.

It was not very long before Joseph saw on the opposite side of the door the faint light of a half-opened bull's-eye lantern. This light was fixed upon him.

The boy sprang aside; the light followed him though at every movement.

Suddenly Joseph saw another thing shine. He quickly guessed that it was the barrel of a pistol and courageously advanced with drawn sword.

A loud report shook the cellar and reached through the labyrinthine galleries. A terrific noise followed; the ground shook, and Joseph was thrown to the floor.

All the lights were extinguished, and all around was darkness. Joseph felt himself. He was not wounded. He crawled on his knees to the wall, and then further along

that way. He convinced himself that the chests with the gold and jewels were likewise uninjured; but when he came to the place where the door formerly was, he stumbled upon a mass of ruins.

"Ha!" he shudderingly said to himself, "I am lost. The stairs have crumbled together through the shock. I am walled in alive!"

CHAPTER XI

NIGHT

FOR the first hour Joseph was greatly dispirited. He remained lying on the same place where he had been thrown.

"Why should I struggle any more?" he said to himself. "I am buried alive. How shall I get out of this grave when far stronger men than I could find no remedy to escape death? Let it come!"

But death did not come, only a firm, dreamless sleep.

How long did it last? An hour or a day?

Joseph never found out. When he awoke it was so pitch dark that he actually could not see his hand before his eyes.

The rest he had had gave him back all his energy. It was now a question of saving himself and not of death.

How should he rescue himself? After tapping about for a long time he discovered the candle again. It was wet and dirty. He then tore with his hands, feet, and nails a few splinters from the chests and muskets, with the help of which he managed to build a kind of fire.

This fire without flame—the wood was too wet to burn brightly—still gave forth at least a gleam which Joseph kept up by continually fanning the coals.

His next movement was to clear away the debris.

This, however, was a work which required the strength of a far more powerful man than Joseph and would take several days. Yet he did not despair of success.

He used one of the big oak boards out of which the chests were made as a pick and threw the big stones one after the other on the opposite side into the empty space.

This gigantic work occupied several hours. He did not feel at all fatigued, but hunger and thirst plagued him.

Fortunately, he still possessed a small bottle of brandy. He drank a few drops of it from time to time, and this gave him artificial strength.

The principal obstacle was a huge stone stair. If this stone could be removed, Joseph would then be able to return to the large grotto, and, perhaps, rescue himself.

For hours Joseph worked at this single stone. At length the gigantic mass gave a shove, and, with a thunderous noise, tumbled on to the other side.

Joseph now thought himself saved. He sank upon his knees, and stammered a low prayer of thankfulness.

For thirty-six hours he had not taken anything to strengthen himself except a few drops of brandy.

He swallowed the contents still left in the bottle at one gulp, and, picking up a burning brand from the fire, he looked about him to see the destruction caused by the report of the pistol.

The destruction was terrible. The stones were piled on top of each other. Only the banisters of the stairs remained standing.

He had to descend by this dangerous road.

Joseph bound a few pieces of board around his body, to be used to make a fire again in case of necessity, seized the

first firebrand at hand, and courageously began his dangerous undertaking.

He found it easier than he had supposed.

When he had reached the bottom, a new deception awaited him. The passage was blocked in the same way as the door of the treasure chamber.

He determined to push into unknown regions, select the first gallery at hand, and trust to Providence for the rest.

Passages followed passages, and crossed each other in every direction.

Finally he reached an immense, seemingly limitless space—a desert of silence and darkness.

At first he believed that fortune had led him back to the nave, but he looked in vain for the pulpit. He therefore entered one of the passages, and in a short while came upon one of his signs.

He returned to the large room, selected a new passage, and saw again upon the walls one of the awkward crosses which he had himself made.

He turned about continually in a circle, like a blind horse in a carrousel. In a frenzy of rage, he threw his firebrand against the wall, fell on the ground, and exclaimed:

"I must die here!"

He spoke these words aloud, and the cavern re-echoed them.

It seemed to him as if he heard a voice from another world.

Intense hunger gnawed at his vitals, but the greatest torture was thirst. His tongue stuck to his gums, his lips were like burning coals, and he would have given his seat in paradise for a drop of water.

He lay stretched at full length, with his cheek to the

ground. He no longer expected, but actually prayed for death. He again fell asleep. This time his sleep was troubled by dreams. Like the thirsty pilgrims in the desert, he saw seas, rippling brooks, waterfalls and rivers. He continually heard the rushing of the waters. He crept nearer to the spot where the noise seemed to come from, and, curiously, it sounded clearer and stronger.

It was no dream any more! Right near him was a spring, and Joseph, half brought back to life with this hope, thought:

"After I have drunk, I can die."

Yes, the running water was there, and with what delight did he bathe his hands, feet and forehead in it! He drank, and never had a drink tasted better than this subterranean water upon which the sun never shone and which had never been touched by human lips. Joseph's was one of those courageous hearts which are buoyed up by the slightest success.

For the third time since he had entered the grotto, he said to himself:

"I do not want to die."

For the third time he arose and continued his wanderings. After he had gone about twenty steps he paused and then turned about again. He went uphill, but a little reflection told him that it would be better if he went downhill.

He followed the stream; he would have a chance of reaching the spot where its source was or else discover a side passage on the way which cut through the hill in a direct line.

In fact, the brook which Joseph took to be the Tourre was becoming broader and broader.

After he had gone a quarter of an hour longer the noise became so loud that it filled the subterranean chamber with a roaring sound.

At the same time a faint light gleamed from above. The roaring gradually developed into thunder, out of the faint gleam arose lights, and Joseph could see in the semi-obscurity the things around him.

The gallery was becoming narrower, and up in the corner, at a great distance, a blue spot showed itself—the sky!

Down below was the abyss, the bottomless abyss in which the water tumbled with deafening noise. There was no other outlet at hand but the one above. Down below was death, above was life.

There, there up above, the sun shone, the birds sang; the wind whistled through the trees—that was life. Down below, on the other hand, was the empire of horror; the black flood tossed, whirled and thundered; that was death.

Joseph, with the help of his hands and feet, attempted to climb the rock. Very soon he had reached a kind of platform whereon he could rest himself a little.

In the holes in the rock wild herbs grew. Joseph tore up a handful and eagerly devoured them.

This raw meal gave him renewed strength, and with tireless energy he continued his ascent.

His fingers were like iron, his muscles like steel, his hands like pincers, and his eye measured the distances with mathematical precision.

The blue spot above became broader and seemed to hang down further. At first only a point, it gradually became as large as a tablecloth, and in the same degree

as the light became stronger and the air fresher the noise of the water diminished.

Joseph had but twenty feet more to climb.

Up above a voice sang. It was that of a wood-chopper, who, while he was singing, applied vigorous blows with his axe to the root of a tree.

"Come here! Come here!" cried Joseph.

But no answer came. The heavy axe-blows fell and the voice sang.

"Help! Help!" cried Joseph again.

This cry too remained unanswered.

"Ah!" thought Joseph, "I am lost; he does not hear me!"

Suddenly the voice ceased; one more blow with the axe, a terrible crash followed, and Joseph saw a heavy black mass come between him and the sky.

The oak slowly bent and covered the whole abyss with its branches, which almost threw the poor boy down.

But what might have been his misfortune was his fortune.

In despair he clambered on to the highest branch and as thin as it was it yet bore him aloft.

In this way he succeeded in reaching the main branch and clambering to the edge of the abyss.

The wood-chopper leaned on the handle of his axe and sorrowfully looked at his work.

Suddenly he saw a skeleton-like being, with a face as pale as death, spring out of the bowels of the earth, and almost fled from terror. Joseph stumbled a few steps and then sank backward on the greensward.

When he returned to himself he saw the face of a young man pityingly bent over him.

The wood-chopper made a pillow of moss and carefully covered the young man with it.

"I thank you," murmured Joseph. "Where am I?"

"Where?" replied the wood-chopper. "In the forest of Braconne."

"I am hungry!" murmured Joseph.

"I should think so. Wait a moment, I will get something."

With these words the brave young man ran for his bag and took a piece of rye bread and a few nuts out of it.

Joseph looked at these coarse articles of food with a greedy eye and immediately devoured them.

When he had drunk and eaten he wanted to arise, but could not. He leaned on his elbows, but could not stand this posture long. He became unconscious.

CHAPTER XII

AN INTERESTING CRIMINAL TRIAL

THE whole of France was interested in a scandalous criminal trial which took place at Limoges.

The Countess Helene de Quisran-Rancogne, *nee* Roumieux, was indicted for poisoning her husband.

Count George, as his widow herself said, was the best and most tender husband there ever was.

What motive could have induced this unhappy woman to commit such a crime?

There was a rumor that there were two brothers, between whom an enmity existed on account of a common love, of a great passion, to which the only obstacle in the way was the existence of Count George.

This passion was openly confessed by the prisoner, although she said she was innocent.

Several persons defended the virtue of the Countess Helene. The first of these was the maid Rosa. The second defender was the honorable Hercules Champion, a distant relative of the prisoner, who had lived several years in the same house and denied that there was any crime.

Yet the autopsy, which had been made by several

Parisian physicians, proved conclusively that there was poison in the body of the deceased.

The indictment was a masterpiece of lucidity. It narrated the happy life led by the young couple until the arrival of young Octave, from which time on an ominous passion arose in the breast of the young countess.

"From that day on," read the indictment, "Count George was melancholy and abstracted. He no longer busied himself with his affairs, but left the management of the iron works to a relative, Hercules Champion, who was faithfully devoted to him and his wife.

"An unholy passion must necessarily end in a catastrophe. In fact, young Octave, without giving any explanation, joined a political conspiracy. No sooner had he departed than the husband and wife lived happy again. Count George forgave his wife.

"But, instead of being submissive, this woman made use of this forgiveness to rid herself of the matrimonial chains which bound her.

"Hardly a few days had passed than she began her murderous undertaking. At the expiration of a few months Count George died from the effects of poison.

"A last interview took place between Count George and his unfaithful wife. The count is said to have made it his wife's duty to marry his brother Octave.

"Outside of the fact that this pretended interview has never been proved, it does not follow that the count, who did not cease to love his wife an hour, knew of her and his brother's deviltry.

"Yet, even had he suspected a poisoning, an attempt upon his life, he would, as a Christian, have forgiven; but one thing is certain, he would never have thought of

bringing about a union between his guilty wife and her accomplice.

"The truth is that he believed he was dying from his sickness and melancholy, while in reality he succumbed from the effects of the poison.

"The question then arises: 'Was Count George really poisoned?'

"The autopsy places it beyond a doubt.

"Who gave the poison to the victim?

"A workman named Francois Limaille had been discharged by Hercules Champion. He, on repeated occasions, had bragged to his fellow-workmen of the great influence he possessed, and that no one would dare to send him away. In fact, the countess intervened for him, and Limaille was *not* sent away.

"This Limaille was sent to the apothecary shop of Argoux on several occasions to buy arsenic, on the ground that it was used to kill rats, of which there were any number in Noirmont.

"Who could have had an interest in the death of Count George, except his widow, his sole heir, who, through his decease, gained a freedom she had long looked for?"

The moderate tone in which this document was drawn up made it the more strong.

Helene listened to its reading, motionless and dazed. She acknowledged the truth of the facts, but denied ever having contemplated a crime, the mere mention of which made her shudder. She declared that Hercules Champion was the murderer, and no one but him had poisoned Count George. He had driven Octave into the moor, which was his grave. Champion let her talk without in-

terrupting her. He appeared to be listening to her with painful surprise.

Even when she had finished, and had sunk back on the bench overcome, he did not answer.

"Your honor," he finally said, when the judge requested him to speak, "when I came here to speak for the innocence of my unhappy relative I was not prepared to hear myself accused of the crime from which I thought of clearing her. The deed has either been done by the Countess Helene or by me. I am so strongly conscious of my innocence that I am prepared for the accusation."

The examination which Monsieur Hercules Champion demanded proved his entire innocence.

Helene had hurt her case very much by her stand against Champion.

On the morning of the decisive day she would probably have been declared not guilty, but after this scene she was surely condemned, even by those who had been her stanch defenders.

The jury brought in a verdict of guilty with extenuating circumstances, and Helene Roumieux, widowed Quisran-Rancogne, was sentenced to imprisonment for life with hard labor.

She listened to the verdict in a daze. She did not cry, scream, or faint. Motionless and cold as a marble statue, she seemed to be saying to herself at this moment:

"All is over now!"

Her lawyer tried in vain to induce her to appeal the case.

She declared that she had already dragged down and soiled the name she had the honor to bear, without doing it further injury by a new scandal.

The lawyer was so foolish as to repeat these words to others, and every one looked upon it as a confession.

In consequence of certain influences which were brought to bear, Helene's sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in jail, and Rosa was permitted to become her companion.

The criminal trial was followed by a civil one.

It was a question of the fate of Blanche de Rancogne, of the poor child which could not know its mother, without at the same time despising herself.

Here too Hercules Champion showed himself the gentleman. He did not betray the slightest anger at the accusation made against him by her mother, and devoted all his time to the interests of the child.

He declined through delicacy to become Blanche's guardian, and recommended Monsieur Matifay for this confidential position.

It did not take Champion long to restore the iron works of Noirmont to their former prosperity; and finally, at the solicitation of the president of the company, Blanche's guardian, he consented to become the manager of the concern.

Thus ended this affair which had so long occupied the attention of the public.

Helene's behavior remained the same in the jail. Just as she was on the day of her sentence, she was now—no tears, no smiles.

The only recreation she had was the society of Rosa and the visits of the prison chaplain.

Sometimes a nun would ask him:

"How does it stand, abbé; do you think the prisoner is guilty? Tell us the truth."

"Who can tell? Whether she was guilty or not, she is now a saint."

Poor Helene had shed too many tears to be appeased or quieted by this now. Her eyes were dry now. Yet her misfortune continually hovered before them. Not a second passed but what she thought of it; at night she dreamed of it, and her face had assumed a stony expression.

When the other prisoners saw her wander about the corridors with the fixed stare of a spectre, they softly whispered to one another:

"Remorse tortures her!"

CHAPTER XIII

CLEMENT

THE wood-chopper Clement lived in a forester's house on the edge of the woods, a house which was only a ruin.

Nothing could be more lonesome than this spot.

The moss looked gray here; even the verdure had a blackish tinge, and the only birds' voices heard were the croak of the hawk and the woodpecker.

And yet the cheerful Clement lived in this lonely valley alone.

He had been given this house as a reward for his services and energy. But his real habitation was not this hole, but the forest.

There he spent his days from the first rays of the dawning sun until the last gleam of twilight. Used to solitude from his earliest youth, he had made the rocks and the oaks his friends. The squirrel was his chum, and the rabbit his cousin.

He knew what the wind whispered in the trees, and from the rustling of a leaf he could tell even at night what it was, whether an oak, elm or ash tree.

He used to tell wonderful stories about the ants, beetles, and all the other little insects which are in the moss.

And yet he had no other instructor in these things than nature itself. The nightingale, in the same way, was the only music-teacher he had ever had, and yet the young girls exclaimed in sincere admiration:

"No one knows how to sing a nicer and more jolly song than Clement."

He composed his own songs; he was his own poet, his own singer, and the majority of times his own audience.

He sang everything that entered his head; rhyme and metre came of their own accord.

The shepherdesses and farm girls knew this.

When they heard the well-known sound of the axe at the edge of the woods, they hurried together, hid themselves behind the bushes, and listened to his songs.

Sometimes the handsome wood-chopper observed this, and only sang the better.

For a long time, however, the shepherdesses had not heard him, and they asked each other in surprise:

"What is the matter with Clement? It is not winter yet, and the nightingale still sings."

Clement seldom left his hut any more.

With the tenderness of a mother, or Sister of Charity, he nursed his new friend Joseph, who had been feverish for three months.

But now Joseph was already so far restored that his entire convalescence was only a question of time.

Lying in the large bed, he looked at his benefactor, who was sitting in a corner of the room, making chairs.

In the delirium of the fever he had forgotten all about his adventures.

But now everything returned to his mind. He raised himself upright in bed and threw the bedclothes from him.

Clement hurried toward him at once.

"What is the matter, little one? Why do you throw the cover away? Have patience a few days longer and then you may be able to make an effort and get up. Let me cover you again, my good boy! For several months past you have been talking of nothing else but gold, jewels, and such things. One would suppose that the king was a beggar compared to you. Shake such ideas out of your head, little one, otherwise the fever will come back."

"No, my good Clement, no," replied Joseph in a firm tone, "the fever will not come back again. Feel my hand and see how fresh and cold it is. I am well again, Clement; I am as sane as you are, and I swear to you that if you will assist me, as soon as I am able to get up and walk I will make you richer than any one in the whole neighborhood."

"Explain yourself more clearly."

"Have you never heard speak," asked Joseph, "of the treasure in the grottoes of Rancogne?"

"Yes, certainly!" exclaimed Clement; "but I have never been so foolish as to believe in it, like old Petase, who wanted to find the treasure and nearly starved to death."

"Well, I have been luckier," replied Joseph; "I have found the treasure!"

Clement looked at him in surprise.

Joseph continued:

"There is really a treasure there. There are more gold pieces than could go in this room. Large chests are full of them, and there are others full of gold and silver things. But to get this treasure, Clement, we must have courage,

for we cannot reach it otherwise than through the hole up which I came."

"But," murmured Clement, "would we not be committing a robbery?"

"Oh, no," replied Joseph, hurriedly, as he again raised himself up in his couch; "on the contrary, we shall be doing a great and noble work. I am speaking candidly to you because you rescued me, and I have confidence in you. We shall get the treasure, Clement, but not for us."

He then told Helene's story as well as he could, and spoke of Count George's death and Biasson's will.

Clement listened attentively to him, and when Joseph described the terrors of the grottoes and the obstacles he had overcome he exclaimed in the greatest admiration:

"You did this, little one?—you did this?"

"Yes," said Joseph, "I did it; but if you don't stand by me, all my trouble will have been for nothing."

"It shall not be so!" exclaimed Clement. "I will stand by you, little one! We shall rescue your pretty, brave countess! If we do not get out of the hole together, then it is God's will that the treasure should not be unearthed."

The two young men shook hands, and then began to work out a plan to carry out their great undertaking.

The first thing necessary was good strong ropes.

The kind-hearted wood-chopper looked at his half-finished basket with sorrowful eyes.

"Hemp is dear," he said; "we could make baskets a good many months, and yet not earn as much money as we need. Then your medicines cost something, and the druggist gives just as little credit as the baker."

Joseph stretched out his hand for his clothes, which lay

rolled up at the edge of the bed, and took out of the girdle the gold pieces Biasson had given him.

"Is that enough money?" he asked.

From that day on nothing else was talked of in the wood-chopper's cabin, but this great expedition to the subterranean chambers. Joseph was soon entirely convalescent.

As soon as he could walk the two friends went to the spot to talk over the last details of their project.

The oak-tree which Clement had chopped off still lay in the same place. In this way it formed a splendid support for fastening the rope.

The descent was therefore easy, but how could they return loaded with the enormous burden of the treasure?

"We shall see!" cried Clement, "when we get down there."

Clement bought ropes, pickaxes, and other necessary things.

He only went out at night and returned the following morning.

When Joseph asked him about it, he laughed mysteriously and said:

"Let me alone, little one. Only look out for yourself and regain your strength. As soon as the time comes, I will tell you my idea."

A few days later, Clement, on throwing the hammer away, suddenly cried:

"So! Everything is ready now. If you were firm on your feet now we could begin our great work to-day."

As he said this, he placed the chest he had just finished upon his shoulders.

The chest was firm and light, and had two hand-grips on top.

Joseph did not hesitate long, and half an hour later they were both on their way to the grotto.

Nothing seemed changed there.

The oak still covered the greater part of the opening.

Clement sat on the trunk, balanced himself with his hands and glided down to where the first branch began, that is, to nearly the centre of the black opening.

Suddenly Joseph saw him give a bound and disappear under the branches.

At first he thought his friend was lost, but soon came to the conclusion that if Clement had met with an accident he would have uttered a cry, and taking the same road, he soon reached the spot where the wood-chopper had disappeared.

This disappearance was now explained.

On the very first branches of the oak a rope with knots was fastened, which could not be seen from above, and by means of which one could easily reach the lower platform of the rock.

Here Clement was already standing, and winked at Joseph to follow him.

Here Clement's real work began, a gigantic work if one considers that he did it entirely at night and without any assistance.

The platform was broadened, the rock bored through, and a kind of magazine established, which contained a store of provisions.

Up above the mouth of the abyss a thick log was laid across like a bridge, and fastened on both ends with iron hooks.

"And you made all this?" cried Joseph, beside himself with admiration.

Without answering this question, Clement had already ascended two rungs of the rope-ladder he had made.

"Wait for the chest," he cried. "I will let it down to you."

It was night.

A few peasant girls who were returning from the fair at Laroche heard a melancholy song in the neighboring forest.

"That is Clement," they said as they stood still.

The song soon ended, and nothing more was heard but the whispering of the wind through the trees.

This was in fact the last time that Clement was ever heard to sing in this neighborhood.

CHAPTER XIV

AN OFFICIAL

IT IS about five o'clock in the morning. The day breaks, and the first cold rays shine through the shutters.

A man sits at a desk covered with papers, and seems to be buried in thought.

From time to time he arises and walks up and down the room. Then he sits down again, and feverishly turns over the papers in front of him.

The District-Attorney Maury-Duquesnel—for we are at his house now—was then about fifty years old, but hard work had already covered his brow with wrinkles.

Maury-Duquesnel was still unmarried, and when his friends joked him about it, and tried to convert him to wedlock, he contented himself with laughingly shaking his head.

Like all bachelors, the man of whom we are speaking looked upon himself as a sceptic.

But there was bitterness in his scepticism.

He had seen crime under all its forms and too near at hand not to look upon it as a disease.

"Mad dogs must be rendered harmless forever," he replied to those who discussed capital punishment in his presence, "though we must not be cruel to them."

He had never met with a case before like the criminal one of Quisran-Rancogne.

Through the mass of fact forced to bow to the accusations contained in the indictment, he still doubted, and that is why we find him now, more than six months after the conviction of the Countess Helene, busy going through the papers in the trial.

The door of the study slowly opened.

Laurent, the district-attorney's servant, entered on his toes with a bundle of wood under his arm, and lighted the fire without appearing to be at all surprised to see his master up at so early an hour.

The noise of the crackling flames moved the official to turn around.

"Ah, it is you, Laurent!" he said; "has any one been here?"

"No, sir."

"I expect somebody. Would you recognize the young man again whom I received the other day?"

"He is still young, and small, and has no beard?"

"Yes, I mean him. As soon as he comes let him in."

"Yes, sir."

At this moment a knock was heard at the door.

"That must be he," cried Monsieur Maury-Duquesnel, as he arose. "Let no one disturb us! Do you understand, Laurent? Come in!"

The reader would hardly have recognized Joseph in the new-comer.

The few months which have passed since the beginning of our story have turned the boyish face into that of a man.

Joseph still wore the Limousin peasant costume.

He held his broad-brimmed hat in his hand, and, shaking his blond locks back, he approached the official with an open, frank expression on his face.

"Ah, there you are at last!" said the latter. "I was impatiently awaiting you. The news you told me day before yesterday almost robbed me of my senses. I had an innocent person convicted! I—"

"Not only an innocent person," remarked Joseph, in a grave voice, "but a holy one."

The district-attorney nervously grasped one of the papers, and exclaimed:

"And when one thinks that it is all true, and that we have committed an injustice which cannot be made good again!"

He turned around to Joseph, and added:

"But you are not lying to me?"

"No, I am not lying."

"No, no," said the official, as if speaking to himself, "with such a voice and such a look one does not lie."

After a short pause he continued:

"Perhaps I have not heard certain details of your story. Tell it to me again. I had these papers brought to me to compare your information with the declarations of the witnesses. Relate slowly, and do not forget anything."

"I will not forget anything," replied Joseph.

And he began.

Day by day, hour by hour, he initiated the official into all the details, even the most trivial ones, of this mysterious drama.

Nothing could be heard in the immense room but Joseph's clear voice, an exclamation from time to time by his companion, and the rustling of the trial papers.

The narrative lasted long.

When it was finished and the official and the boy looked at each other, both their foreheads were covered with perspiration.

The district-attorney walked up and down his study a few times and then stood still in front of Joseph.

"Whom do you accuse, then?" he asked.

"I accuse Hercules Champion, Matifay, Dr. Toinon and the workman Limaille," replied Joseph. "Hercules Champion poisoned his own benefactor, Count George, and had the Countess Helene falsely convicted. Dr. Toinon is an accomplice of this double crime, and Matifay and Limaille brought about the death of poor Count Octave in the moor."

"But the proofs," exclaimed the official, "the proofs?"

They were both silent for a moment.

"Between you and me," said the district-attorney, "no proofs are necessary. I believe you; but would it be satisfactory to the jury? The Countess of Rancogne has herself, in refusing to appeal her case, prohibited any revision of the trial. Public opinion is against the countess, and I am positive that if we try to rehabilitate her we will only cause her to be more severely judged. What am I to do?"

Joseph grasped the hand of the humane district-attorney and pressed it to his lips.

"Do as you think best, M. District-Attorney," he then said. "I told you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, as it was my duty. I leave the fate of the countess in your hands, and am positive that she will never find a nobler defender."

"Yes, yes," cried the district-attorney, "I shall fulfil this duty."

That was a happy day for the poor prisoner; Joseph could visit her in prison and console her.

When she did not see him appear in the course of her trial, she thought to herself:

"He probably lost his life in trying to defend my poor Octave."

A more dispirited thought was:

"He too has betrayed me! He too has joined my pursuers."

But Joseph was not dead, nor had he become a traitor. He lay on his knees before his mistress as if she were a saint, he covered her hands with tears, he told her he was working to secure her freedom, and that she would be saved. At four o'clock Joseph left the prison, but promised to come to her every day until his and the district-attorney's efforts had been crowned with success.

When it became dark that night Helene received a second visit, that of Monsieur Maury-Duquesnel himself.

He believed in the innocence of the Countess of Rancogne.

He did not visit her in his official position, but as a defender, a friend.

A rehabilitation in open court was not possible, for the reasons he had already given Joseph.

The countess had not made an appeal, and, to begin the case over again, the real criminals must be judicially pursued.

But there were no proofs against them excepting Joseph's, the countess's, and Rosa's declarations.

It could therefore be foreseen that Champion and his accomplices would be set free and the situation remain unchanged.

The countess's silence betrayed her hopeless spirit and showed conclusively that she agreed with the district-attorney.

She listened to him with bowed head, and big tears rolled down her emaciated cheeks.

Ah, she had been so foolish as to hope!

When she saw Joseph return, when she saw her accuser become her defender, she had said to herself:

"God is just! Fate is tired of pursuing me. The undeserved punishment will be transformed into glorious martyrdom!"

And yet all this was only a dream, and the commiseration of her former accuser condemned her more than his sentence.

"God's will be done!" she said at length, restraining her tears by force of will. "Condemned to live in this shameful grave forever, I shall at least have the consolation of knowing that there was one upright man who believed in my innocence. I thank you for having come here; you did me a great wrong, but unconsciously and in the pursuance of a sacred duty. If my pardon is necessary to ease your conscience, I grant it to you from the bottom of my heart. I give you even more, I present you with the esteem of a woman who has been loaded with unmerited contumely, but yet stands here as pure as when the world honored her and envied her happiness."

She held her white hand to the jurist, who clasped it in his own.

When she attempted to withdraw it, he held it firmly.

"Why do you wish to discourage us both?" he said. "No, no, all is not yet lost."

"What do you say?" cried Helene; "I beg you explain yourself more clearly."

"Yes, countess," continued the district-attorney, "the stone over your grave will be raised, and through me. But even for this work I need assistance, which you alone can give me."

"What do you wish?"

"You should merely sign this document."

"That will be done at once."

Her trembling hand seized the paper from out of that of her rescuer.

As soon as her eyes fell upon it, she let it fall again.

"A petition for a pardon!" she murmured; "if I signed this, that would be equivalent to a confession of my guilt. I demand justice, not a pardon. Oh, how can you advise me to take such a step?"

"I advise you again," exclaimed the jurist, eagerly. "This petition—I give you my word of honor—is only a mere matter of form. You will go out of your cell as pure, in the eyes of the world, as you are in your own heart. You demand a rehabilitation, and you shall have one. Only have confidence in me; sign this paper, and give it back to me as if you had employed me to defend you, as I would have done had I not had the misfortune to be your accuser."

He spoke in this vein quite a long time, until Helene turned her pale face toward him, and said:

"You, then, swear to me on your honor, that if I sign this document I am not sanctioning the verdict against me?"

"Yes, I swear it to you."

"Good—then I shall sign."

The district-attorney hid the paper, as soon as Helene had signed her name, in the breast-pocket of his coat, and buttoned it tightly.

"I will stake everything on the game," he then said, "to rescue you, countess—my reputation, my fortune, myself—and I solemnly swear to you again that I will bring you a rehabilitation, and not a pardon."

With these last words he hurried out. Without taking time to go home, he went to the post-office, where an already harnessed horse and coach was waiting for him.

As for Helene, she continued to live the same dreary prison life, though it was gladdened now by a ray of hope.

And Joseph was there, too, repeating to her a hundred times a day the enthusiastic assurance of the district-attorney.

"If he has promised to do it, countess," he said, "then he will do it."

"And if Joseph assures you it will be so, then you must not doubt it any longer," added Rosa.

And Helene smilingly caressed the blond heads of the children sitting at her feet, and at times felt like believing.

CHAPTER XV

THE REHABILITATION

THE absence of the district-attorney lasted about a week—a whole century of doubt and suspense. At length he returned.

Rosa and Joseph were there when the turnkey entered and informed the prisoner of the expected visit.

The next minute would decide her fate.

A hurried step was heard in the corridor, the door opened, and the district-attorney entered.

His face was beaming.

Helene sank back in her chair, and thought:

"I am saved."

Rosa and Joseph made a motion to leave.

The district-attorney made them a sign to remain.

"Countess," he said, turning to Helene, "the steps I took have had the success I anticipated. I had an interview with the king himself, and the doors of this prison can open for you to-day."

With an enthusiastic movement, Helene threw herself on her knees at his feet, shed tears on his hand, and exclaimed:

"Oh, thanks! thanks! May Heaven bless you!"

"Wait a moment, countess," said the district-attorney, as he forced the prisoner to take her seat again; "here

is your pardon, signed by the king. I promised you a solemn rehabilitation and I come to-day to offer it to you."

A short pause ensued.

As Helene did not reply, the official continued:

"You were free, rich, and honored, countess. All this you lost through me; and I look upon it as my duty to give them back to you. The king's kindness permits me to give you freedom; but, as for wealth and honor, I can only give you my wealth and my honor in place of what you have lost."

As Helene looked timidly at him, without understanding what he meant, he added:

"Will you accept half of my name? It is not a brilliant one, but I can swear to you that it is that of an honest man."

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Helene, "it is the name of a good and noble man; but I promised my husband and his poor brother never to bear the name of another man. Besides, your sacrifice would not rehabilitate me. People would say—what do I know? The service you have done me would be ascribed to a miserable purpose which was as far from your thoughts as from mine."

Helene paused a few seconds and then continued:

"I am sorry, now, M. District-Attorney, that you ever took these steps. What I feared has happened. Not justice but mercy wants to open the doors of my cell. God is my witness that I would rather die here with the consciousness of my innocence than be free with the conviction that I, in praying for mercy, confessed my guilt."

Monsieur Maury-Duquesnel was almost crushed.

"Yes, countess," he said, "I acknowledge I acted un-

wisely, but there was no other mode of rescue. Besides I did not have to pray in your name. I spoke with head erect. The king and his minister were convinced. They therefore did not consider it an act of mercy but an act of justice."

After a short pause he added:

"Yet I do not for a moment think of conquering an aversion the delicate nature of which I understand. I therefore have a second proposition to make to you which has been sanctioned by your influential protectors."

At this moment it occurred to him that Rosa and Joseph were still present, and he looked around for them.

Joseph understood the meaning of the glance, seized Rosa by the hand, and went out of the cell with her.

The interview which now took place between Helene and the lawyer lasted a long time.

No one ever knew what it was about.

Joseph only heard the last words, which were spoken at the moment when the district-attorney took leave of Helene, never to see her again.

"M. District-Attorney," she said, in a voice full of gratitude, "if it was only a question of one person I could not accept your sacrifice. But as you were ready to give back her name to the mother, you will permit her to beg you to protect the daughter. If I have this assurance, then my work will be less difficult, and this is the only consolation you can ever give me."

"What! What do I hear?" cried Joseph in affright.

"Yes," replied the district-attorney in a sorrowful voice, "this noble lady has refused the pardon I brought her. The decree was not yet published, and I tore it up."

From that day on Helene became again low-spirited.

Hardly a week had passed since the district-attorney's visit when she was taken seriously ill.

The prison doctor said she was suffering from consumption.

Nothing was spared to save her.

The district-attorney sent for the most celebrated physician in Paris, Dr. Ozam.

Dr. Ozam was soon forced to admit that there was little hope.

"If you wished to live I might be able to save you," said the physician.

The sick woman shook her head as if she desired to say:

"Why should I live?"

In the whole city nothing else was talked of but the "sainted criminal."

"She dies like a martyr," said some.

"Yes," replied others, "but how did she live?"

As for Maury-Duquesnel, he was suddenly seized by a peculiar form of melancholia.

He died the year following, and the doctors who attended him could not give any satisfactory explanation for this sudden dissolution of so powerful a man.

One morning the prison chapel was opened to the public.

The whole city wished to witness the burial of the Countess Helene de Rancogne.

The district-attorney, pale and cold, was at the ceremony.

The spectators took a great interest in Hercules Champion, and his friend Matifay, both of whom, in deep mourning, were present.

A little child dressed in black, and which was carried in its nurse's arms, was also pointed out.

"That is her child!" one whispered to the other; "the poor little one!"

The only real mourners were Joseph and Rosa.

They silently wept within the shadow of a pillar, and their neighbors, surprised at such a manifestation of grief, asked one another:

"Who are they?"

Well-informed persons—and where are they not?—recognized pretty Rosa.

These two faithful servants alone accompanied the coffin to the cemetery.

But no, they were not entirely alone.

Dr. Ozam too wished to show his patient this last honor. On returning from the cemetery, he accosted Rosa and spoke a few words to her.

Had she cried enough?

We do not know.

One thing is certain, that immediately after this interview Rosa dried her tears and did not weep any more.

A week later the papers announced that Helene Roumieux, widow of Count Rancogne, was pardoned—a pardon which came too late.

. . . . . .

Hardly two days had passed since the funeral of the Countess Helena.

A mail-coach stopped in front of the best inn in the little city of Ambazac. Two travellers sat in it.

One of them was still a young man, whose thoughtful brow and thin blond hair betrayed long nights of study.

Next to him sat a boy.

They were Dr. Ozam and Joseph.

The coach stopped, and while the stable-boys exchanged the horses the doctor grasped Joseph's hand and murmured:

"Hope!"

He winked to the landlord, who hurried toward him, and, after a short conversation, carried on in a low tone, the latter disappeared.

Five minutes later fresh horses were harnessed to the coach, and the guard climbed on to the box.

At this moment two women slowly came out of the house, and also took seats in the coach.

Joseph felt his heart drawn together through fear.

One of the women was Rosa.

Who was her companion with the long widow's veil?

Joseph did not dare to ask. The veiled woman, however, opened a prayer-book which she held in her hand, and read in a loud voice these verses from the Bible:

"And Jesus bent over the edge of the grave and cried, Lazarus, arise!

"And Lazarus arose!"

The guard cracked his whip, the bells jingled, and the horses departed at a sharp trot.

In the coach laughter and tears reigned at the same time.

[END OF THE PROLOGUE.]

PART I

THE MISERY OF THE RICH

CHAPTER I

THE BLUE AND THE WHITE

IT WAS in an immense courtyard, shaded by linden-trees—the courtyard of the convent of B——.

The boarding misses played and sang in groups of five and six, like a swarm of little birds set free, while the nuns counted their beads and walked up and down under the trees.

Away at the rear of the courtyard, in a shady corner, two young girls sat alone on a stone bench, under an Indian chestnut-tree, which, though it was still early in the spring, was already green.

One of the girls wore a blue silk ribbon, which hung down to her bosom, and which marks the "great"; the other one, although of about the same age, only had around her neck the white ribbon of the "middle."

The first, the blue one, was a charming blonde of seventeen summers.

The aristocratic, fine form of her hands, her feet and her long neck, were visible signs of "race." She was also rich; this was betrayed by her silk dress.

The other boarding-school miss was a brunette and just as handsome as her companion, though her beauty was of a more ordinary kind.

She was dressed in the regulation woollen dress, and the traces on her small, neat fingers of needle-points showed that the art of sewing and knitting was not only a distraction for her, but a means of support.

Ursula Durand paid, in fact, for her board and instruction by keeping the sisters' wash in order, while Mademoiselle Cyprienne de Puysaie was the pride and the most aristocratic scholar of the convent.

Yet the young aristocrat and the modest workingwoman conversed pleasantly together.

They were intimate friends, and this was explained by the fact that the convent in B—— only took scholars up to their fifteenth year.

Only Cyprienne and Ursula were, either on account of the negligence of their folks or from some other reason, kept there beyond the usual age when rich families generally take back their daughters to give them at home a more worldly education than the good sisters are able to impart.

In this regard, though, nothing was missed by the blond Cyprienne, for teachers came to her from the city to instruct her in the different arts not mentioned in the curriculum of the convent.

As for Ursula, she undoubtedly belonged to a poor family, who were not able to pay for a luxurious education.

This was the reason why Cyprienne and Ursula became such good friends. They were the two eldest girls in the convent.

Ursula knew none of her family except a married cousin, who was called Madame Celine Morel.

This handsome young woman seemed to love Ursula

passionately, and whenever she visited the convent there were tears, embraces, and kisses without end.

Madame Morel had only paid the tuition fee the first years, and expressed the wish in advance that Ursula would, in the future, try to help herself as much as possible.

The lady superior was no doubt aware of Madame Morel's secret, for she often said to Ursula:

"You must pray for your cousin, child, and love her very much."

Cyprienne, on the other hand, knew her parents, and felt, perhaps on account of it, the more unhappy.

Why had these parents, who were rich and aristocratic, and belonged to the first circles of Parisian society, banished their daughter so far from them?

Why had she, the same as Ursula, to pass the vacations for ten years in the damp courtyards, or in the large, monotonous gardens of the convent?

She was not loved, no doubt? Ah! unfortunately poor Cyprienne, when she read the dry, cold letters of her mother, could only answer the question with *yes.*

Ursula at least had a mystery in her life. Cyprienne, on the contrary, whose situation was perfectly clear, could only find *one* reason for the silence and negligence of her folks—indifference or hatred.

Her father only visited her three times a year in the parlor.

He asked her then whether she wanted anything, whether she felt unhappy, then kissed her on the forehead and pressed a well-filled purse in her hand.

That was all.

How often had Cyprienne, when she heard the parlor

door close behind him, said to herself in sorrow that it would have been preferable to her if he did not visit her at all.

One day, however—it was now about a year ago—she had been very happy.

She had received a letter from her mother, a short, cold letter, as usual, wherein she was told to be industrious and give satisfaction to the lady superior.

Far down on the paper, underneath the signature, Cyprienne noticed a white round spot, the trace of a tear.

Her mother had wept when she wrote her this cold note! She was loved by her then!

How tenderly the poor girl kissed that tear spot, and how pleased she was when Ursula gave it the same meaning as she did! From that time on the two friends spoke of nothing else but Cyprienne's mother.

On the day we enter the convent very little conversation occurred on the stone bench, but a great deal of crying was indulged in. Cyprienne had received a letter that morning from her father, in which he notified her of his intended visit.

The hour had come, the letter said, when Cyprienne was to leave the convent, return to her folks, and make her *debut* in society.

What would become of her if she were separated from her best, her only friend?

Ursula possessed a courageous heart. She restrained her tears, and was the first to smile.

"Why do you wish to be gloomy?" she said. "You are going now to your mother."

"Yes," replied Cyprienne, sighing, "but I lose you."

"Oh," replied Ursula, "you will visit concerts and

balls, and have all kinds of amusement. You will soon forget poor Ursula."

"No, never! never! I swear it to you!"

"You are rich, aristocratic, and beautiful as an angel. I should like to see you when you are dressed for your first ball."

A pause ensued which lasted several minutes.

"Ah, Cyprienne," continued Ursula, "I love you so much that it seems to me we have only one soul. You have only to be handsome. I am nothing more than a poor girl without name or fortune."

The recess was at an end; the bell rang, and arm in arm the two young girls strode toward the main room.

On the way they were met by a sister, who requested them to go with her to the lady superior.

"We two?" asked Ursula.

"Yes, both," replied the sister.

The lady superior awaited her two "children" in the little oratory which served her as a reception-room.

When she saw the two young girls enter, she went toward them, kissed them on the forehead, and let them seat themselves.

"My dear children," she then said, "I wish to speak to both of you, for what I have to say concerns you both. You, Cyprienne, have received a letter from your father; I have received one from your cousin, Ursula, and you will be taken away, too. Hold fast to your friendship. When you need protection or consolation, seek it one from the other. Cyprienne, I intrust Ursula to you. Ursula, I intrust Cyprienne to your care. And now embrace me, my children, and farewell."

The two young girls nervously clambered about the

pious woman, whom they would probably never see again.

Cyprienne presented Ursula with a nice white autograph album, on the cover of which the word *Friendship* was inscribed in golden letters.

Ursula expended her few earnings in a like present for Cyprienne; her album being bound in blue.

"In this way," she said, "we still remain the blue and the white."

The day following a good many tears were shed in the parlor.

Monsieur de Puysaie was there.

Cyprienne already sat in the mail-coach before Ursula, who had clambered on to the wheel, would leave off embracing her.

Finally Ursula descended, the coach-door was noisily shut, and the carriage rolled off.

Ursula was to depart at night in the diligence in the company of a stout woman, who had come to take her away.

This stout woman, who had coarse, vulgar manners, had never been to the convent before, although she called herself Ursula's aunt.

With a smiling face she informed her niece that the latter would take up her home with her in the future.

"We are not rich, my dear child," she said, "but we have good hearts. I am a genial woman and so is my Gosse. Gosse is my husband, and consequently your uncle. Madame Morel has intrusted you to our care, and you can feel assured that you will be in good hands."

In this way the conversation went on throughout the whole journey. At the end of three or four hours Ursula had become used to the chatter of her aunt and inquired

what plans her married cousin, Madame Morel, had made for her.

In this way Ursula learned that she would have to support herself.

She was rather pleased at hearing this, for then she would not be under obligations to the Gosses.

Madame Morel had looked out in advance for employment for Ursula.

She was to work for Madame Rozel, who owned one of the largest linen-draper shops in Paris, and live with the Gosses in a neat little room.

Three-quarters of an hour later the diligence stopped in the courtyard of the Place Notre-Dame des Victoires; and, almost deafened by the noise about her, Ursula, who had taken Madame Gosse's arm, comprehended that two persons who love each other, and live in the same city, can still be further apart than if separated by hundreds of miles.

In the courtyard where the diligence had stopped a little man with a pointed nose stood, and seemed to be waiting for some one.

Madame Gosse, on her side, rolled her eyes about and seemed to be looking for some one.

As soon as she saw the little man, she sprung toward him and dragged Ursula after her.

"Come, come quick! Here he is!"

The next minute she had clasped the little man in her arms and exclaimed:

"Good-day, old boy! I bring you your niece, Ursula."

"The old boy" politely bowed to Ursula, and then, turning to his wife coldly, he said:

"Good-morning, my dear Babette."

CHAPTER II

A BALL AT THE COUNTESS OF MONTE-CRISTO'S

DURING the winter of the year 18—, the Countess of Monte-Cristo was the queen of the season. Where she came from no one knew.

She must be of aristocratic lineage; her majestic bearing proved it beyond a doubt.

The people who pretended to know everything—and they form quite a number in the small city which is called "All Paris"—had each a legend ready about the Countess of Monte-Cristo.

Some said she was a Moldavian princess who travelled about in the style of Queen Christine of Sweden.

Others said she came straight from Constantinople, where she had married the sultan.

Others, again, said she was only an intimate friend of the well-known Lady Hester Stanhope, who was the talk of Europe at that epoch.

Whichever was the case, and which of these versions might appear to be the most plausible to our readers, one thing was certain anyhow, namely, that the Countess of Monte-Cristo was the star of the great world this year, a star of the first rank.

Her house in the Champs-Elysees was second to none

in Paris, and her horses and carriages were the admiration of all who saw them.

No one knew the value of her diamonds, yet they represented an enormous sum.

The countess had engaged her servants only since her stay in Paris, so that none of them knew anything of the past history of their mistress.

One man alone could perhaps have been able to say something about it, yet he kept silent.

This man, who seemed to be the favorite of the Countess of Monte-Cristo, called himself Vicomte de la Cruz.

He said he was a Spanish Creole, and his light brown complexion went far to prove his assertion.

The ladies thought him very handsome, though somewhat stern. The men eagerly sought to make his acquaintance, though having a slight fear of him at the same time.

His life, outside of his attachment to the Countess of Monte-Cristo, was not at all mysterious.

He himself said that he had an income of forty thousand francs and owned a house on the corner of the Chaussee d'Antin. He was unmarried, and disliked to speak about his age.

Scandalous tongues maintained that he dyed his hair. This man possessed, as far as was known, only one weakness, which had its romantic side, too, and in a measure justified it.

This weakness was called Aurelie, and lived in a ground floor of the house in the Chaussee d'Antin, about which wonderful stories were told.

Every man of the world in Paris knew by sight this

handsome lady, who owed her first successes to her resemblance to the Countess of Monte-Cristo.

On the evening of which we speak, a ball and reception took place at the house of the Countess of Monte-Cristo.

The whole diplomatic, aristocratic and financial world of Paris were invited.

Aristocratic ladies in full dress, gray-headed cavaliers decorated with medals, young officers in gold epaulets, and young girls in white dresses and flowers, stepped out of the carriages which drove up to the front door in one continual stream.

The Countess of Monte-Cristo received her guests in the grand drawing-room.

Some she greeted with a nod of the head, others with a smile, to a third she addressed a few words—words which made one happy and a hundred curious.

When the Count of Puysaie was announced, she was observed to half arise from her chair.

The count, with his wife on his arm, approached her, and the Countess of Monte-Cristo now arose entirely from her chair and went toward them.

"How good of you to come," she said; "I was already beginning to fear you would not come, and thus deprive us of the pleasure of seeing this charming child."

As she said this she pointed to Cyprienne, who blushingly hung to the arm of Colonel Fritz, her father's intimate friend.

"The poor little one!" said the mother, laughing with pride and joy, "she is very timid. This is the first time she shows herself outside of her convent."

"If one has such eyes it is needless to be afraid," said

the Countess of Monte-Cristo. "Look at us, dear child, and confess that we do not inspire you with fear."

Cyprienne timidly raised her eyes, and read in the handsome face of the countess such sympathetic interest, such hearty frankness, that she involuntarily felt herself drawn toward her.

"You are not afraid of me, are you?" asked the countess.

"Oh, no," stammered Cyprienne.

"Well, then, we are friends. You will stay at my side to-night, so that I can introduce you to our little world."

She then turned to the colonel and continued:

"I am sorry to take your partner from you, colonel, but I cannot help it. I see Baron de Matifay looking for some one, and I should not be surprised if it were you."

These last words were spoken in such a peculiarly ironical tone that the colonel was dazed and looked sharply at the countess.

She answered it with a friendly smile, and he bowed deeply, losing himself in the crowd, while the Count of Puysaie soon followed him.

Count Loredan de Puysaie was about forty years of age, and, in spite of his small stature, one of the most elegant cavaliers of his time.

A millionnaire and peer of France at twenty-six years of age, he had placed himself in a position through his marriage with Mademoiselle de Boismont-Simeuse to ask for everything and to get it.

Yet one day the active young man changed into a gray-haired old man, who had nothing youthful about

him but his dandyism, and who was such a great sceptic that it was more of a mania than scepticism.

As soon as he discovered Colonel Fritz again, he led him into a corner of the room.

"Well, how does it stand?" he then asked.

"He creates difficulties," replied Fritz.

"Doesn't he want to keep his word?" asked Loredan, turning pale.

"Not that," replied the colonel, briefly; "he fears that you will not keep yours."

Loredan took this insult without moving a muscle. He only became paler, that was all.

"Yes, yes," he said, "these financiers are all alike. Monsieur Matifay shall pay me for this doubt."

"Dearly," added the colonel, laughing.

"And yet," continued Loredan after a short silence, "I must have these one hundred thousand francs to-night without fail. She demands them."

"And you will get them," replied Fritz, "only let me hook the old fox. I tell you in advance that he won't have much patience any longer. Your daughter has been home a whole month, and yet you have not said a word."

"I will speak," murmured the Count of Puysaie, impatiently.

"Undoubtedly," replied Fritz; "but when? It is not right of you to hesitate so long. I know very well that it is a pity that you must cross your old coat of arms with the cash-book of a banker, but it cannot be helped. Besides, *mesalliances* are now the fashion. Matifay belongs to the citizen nobility, is worth thirty millions, and, what is more, is one of those persons whom the papers call a

'character.' This marriage will make you immensely popular, and you can easily become a minister yet."

"That is all very nice," replied Loredan; "and I have weighed the advantages and disadvantages of such a connection. I make my daughter, who is nothing more than the daughter of a ruined nobleman, a millionnairess, and there will not be any lack of persons who will cry from the housetops that I am an affectionate father; but look at HER and then look at HIM!"

For a few minutes he remained buried in thought, then snapping his fingers, said:

"What of it! What of it! Bring me the one hundred thousand francs; that is the principal thing now."

And without waiting for the answer of his friend, he hurried toward a lady who was passing.

The Countess of Monte-Cristo, in the meantime, while talking with the Countess of Puysaie and Cyprienne, did not lose sight of Loredan and Colonel Fritz.

From time to time a contemptuous smile played about her lips.

When Loredan and Fritz separated, she shrugged her shoulders slightly, and gazed sorrowfully at Cyprienne.

Meanwhile the gaze of two men, who stood motionless at opposite corners of the room, seemed to converge in Cyprienne.

The first of these two men we already know.

It was the Vicomte de la Cruz.

The other one, about whom we must say a few words, was Baron Matifay.

Many years ago we saw that pale face, which time has left unchanged. We still see the same blond hair. The twinkling eyes, which formerly looked through a pair of

steel spectacles, are now armed with a gold lorgnon. Yet the man has become different. His genius spread its sails, and everything about him breathes success.

Baron Matifay is not only the richest banker in Paris and the founder of fifteen or twenty banks, the builder of seven or eight canals, but also, as Colonel Fritz said a while ago, "a character."

He was not only looked upon as a millionnaire, but as a kind of Franklin too, a jovial soul and a big heart.

His whole life is a life of study, of self-sacrifice, of duty, and so pure as to be above reproach or calumniation.

A sage wished every one to live in a glass house.

This wish Matifay realized in his own person.

He even did more.

He built himself with great skill a life of crystal.

Yet, there are moments where such features, no matter how accustomed they are to these constant lies, finally slumber. This is the moment chosen by the observer, for at this moment the internal wickedness shines through the deceiving mask of the face as clear and visible as the day.

Matifay is one of these examples.

His eyes sparkle with inextinguishable sensuality. His hanging lips twitch with an obscene, repulsive smile. This man sacrificed everything to obtain a colossal fortune and a spotless reputation.

Matifay's malevolent look did not abash Cyprienne in the least.

With her hand in that of her mother, she felt entirely happy, so happy that it made her look handsomer.

The Vicomte de la Cruz said to himself:

"Oh, God! is it possible to be so beautiful and not live in your paradise?"

Suddenly Matifay gave a start.

A hand was placed on his shoulder.

"Don't you think, baron," whispered the ironical voice of Colonel Fritz in his ear, "don't you think your bride is beautiful?"

"My bride! My bride!" repeated the baron.

"Your bride from to-morrow on," replied the colonel, coolly, "and in a fortnight your wife. But come with me; we cannot converse very well here, and I have something to say to you."

The baron made a gesture of assent, and both of them walked through the groups toward a small, round room between the card and ball rooms, a kind of general passage, which every one walked through and no one stayed in.

At this moment the Countess of Monte-Cristo made an almost imperceptible movement with her fan and threw a look at the Vicomte de la Cruz, which he undoubtedly knew the meaning of, for he immediately came toward the three women.

The Countess of Monte-Cristo introduced him, and the vicomte asked Cyprienne for the next quadrille, which was granted to him with the consent of the Countess of Puysaie.

"No, no," said the Countess of Monte-Cristo, smiling, "I am not satisfied with that. Our pretty Cyprienne is in a measure under my protection to-night, and although she is as good and pious as an angel, I need a quarter of an hour more to finish her education. Have patience until then, vicomte."

The Vicomte de la Cruz bowed.

"Good, so let it be," he murmured.

Both of them exchanged glances during this short conversation, which seemed to be sufficient for them to comprehend each other. The vicomte turned his steps toward the card room; and from this minute on the Countess of Monte-Cristo, who had been for a few seconds abstracted and uneasy, was more attentive and agreeable than ever.

CHAPTER III

FROM THE BLUE DIARY

"I HAVE been a week in Paris.

"Since a week the small blue book you gave me lies upon my table. Since a week I resolve every morning to write at night in it according to your desire, and yet the page still remains white.

"To-day, however, I have taken a great resolution.

"My pa is at his club, mamma has gone out, and I take advantage of this to pour out my heart to you.

"Ah, where are you, my dear Ursula? I do not know.

"Although separated we are still always together, and my soul is so attached to yours that nothing can happen to me, whether joy or sorrow, without your experiencing it too.

"Let me commence with the first day.

"When I sat alone, opposite my father, and could see your dear face no longer, I felt very gloomy and sad.

"My father was very polite toward me, but that only increased my embarrassment. One would have thought I was a stranger to him, so incessantly did he inquire whether it was not too warm or too cold for me, or whether I wanted anything.

"I confess to you that a hearty kiss on the forehead

would have pleased me more than all his attentions. I could not, however, put my arms around my father's neck and beg him not to make such a fuss with me.

"Finally, I feigned sleep. I believe he saw through the little comedy, and was satisfied with it.

"He stretched himself in his corner. I stealthily observed him, and saw he did likewise.

"Do you know that my father is a very handsome man? Only he has a few wrinkles about the mouth which do not please me. His mocking, ironical voice does not please me. It looks as if he were laughing over everything he said, and before I accustomed myself to it, it bothered me a great deal, for I thought he mocked me.

"The journey lasted two days, for we made long pauses, so as not to fatigue ourselves.

"When we reached Paris my heart beat wildly.

" 'That is Paris, is it?' I cried, and leaned out of the carriage window; I only saw, though, long, narrow, dirty streets, crowded with people.

"My father burst into a loud laugh.

" 'Do not look out so curiously, Cyprienne!' he then said, 'the people will think you come from the country.'

" 'But I do come from it.'

"He suddenly became serious, a frown spread over his shrewd face, and I knew I had said something stupid.

" 'You must,' he began again, 'forget your convent. I acknowledge that up till now you have passed your youth alone—that you were somewhat neglected. That is what you intended to tell me?'

" 'Oh, no, no! I was very happy in the convent, yet I am sure I will be still happier by you and mamma.'

"This time I really put my arms about his neck, and he did not make any objection.

" 'Good, good!' he murmured, 'you are now a lovely girl from the country, and will also do us honor as a Parisienne.'

"In the meanwhile the coach continued to roll on.

" 'Here we are in the Rue de Varenne,' said my father, as he looked at his watch; 'it is now ten o'clock; your mother will be at home.'

"At the words 'your mother,' all the blood in my veins rushed to my heart.

"It was the first time that my father had pronounced this name before me.

"Before I could recover from my excitement, a gate opened, the coach rolled into an immense paved court-yard, paused before the glass awning of a porch, and a lackey in livery hurried up and opened the door.

" 'Is madame at home?' asked my father, and without waiting for an answer he entered the corridor, crying to me: 'Come, Cyprienne, come!'

"I felt sad, as I had expected my mother would come to meet me. Ah, how I longed to see her and clasp her in my arms!

"She no doubt did not feel this impatience. She had never felt any longing for me, she had never loved me!

"This thought made me freeze, and pale and trembling I ascended a small narrow staircase behind my father.

"A door opened noiselessly, and I noticed a lady, who stood leaning against the marble mantel-piece.

" 'Madame,' said my father, 'I bring you my daughter, Cyprienne.'

"Only then did she raise her head, and turn her soft, pale face toward me.

"Oh, dear Ursula, what a joy! She wept, she stretched out her arms to me, and I sobbingly threw myself on her bosom.

"My father walked excitedly up and down the room.

"'Come now,' he finally said. 'You will have plenty of time to embrace each other some other time. We must now think of giving this child something to eat and sending it to bed. It must be tired.'

"I wanted to protest, but a look from my mother induced me to keep silent.

"'Just as you wish, Loredan,' she said. 'Cyprienne's room is in order, and if you desire to conduct her there yourself—'

"My father made a gesture as if ashamed of his ill-humor.

"'No, no, Hortense,' he said. 'You understand this better than I do. You know what our plans are with regard to Cyprienne; she is not stupid, I assure you, and will be very presentable.'

"As he said these last words he rang a bell.

"A lackey entered.

"'My letters?' asked my father.

"When the servant brought the letters, my father glanced over the envelopes, selected one of them, broke the seal, and said in a cheerful tone:

"'Here is a letter from the colonel! That fellow, Matifay, seems to grow impatient. Perhaps I shall dine at the club to-day. You have the whole evening to yourselves, and can exchange your confidences undisturbed.'

"He then kissed me on the forehead, and added:

"'*Au revoir*, Miss Parisienne!'

"When I was alone with my mother I began to cry again like a little fool. My heart was eased by it.

"My mother let me sit at her side, held my hands in hers, and never grew tired of looking at me and covering me with kisses.

"She wept too.

"Oh, how I regretted now ever to have doubted her!

"How could I ever have believed that she did not love me!

"A mother, Ursula, is a second self, a heart which beats in harmony with our own, eyes which weep when ours are humid, a mouth which smiles as soon as we smile, and the incarnation of gentleness and that confidence which fills the soul. What one feels for a mother is almost what one feels for the Holy Virgin, only more affection and less reverence.

"Reverence, Ursula, is always cold. If I confessed a fault to the Holy Virgin, I always feared she would not pardon me; but my mother, on the other hand, would try to discover a virtue in my fault.

"After we had kissed and cried for quite a long time, my mother said to me:

"'Come, Cyprienne, I must show you your empire now.'

"Ah, Ursula, I assure you, we have never dreamed of anything more lovely than my room.

"My mother smiled at my admiration, my wonder, and my gratitude.

"It was as if all my caprices had been divined beforehand. My mother had even guessed the colors which I loved most, and how can I describe the joy I felt when

my mother opened a little door and led me down a staircase leading to my garden! Yes, Ursula, my garden, or rather, our garden, for it belongs to us both—my mother and I—is composed of a lane lined with big linden and chestnut-trees, just as in our convent.

"My mother wished to have me believe that it was merely an accident. I showed her, however, that I could not be fooled in this way, pointing to an entirely new fence which had been erected on my account, between the garden of the palace and mine.

"At the moment when I write these lines, my window stands open.

"The air is wafted in, and the tall chestnut-trees almost graze the window-sill with their white and violet buds.

"I am thinking of you. We are still in our old convent. I almost seem to hear the rustling of your white dress in the grass.

"I turn around, and see that I am in a beautiful little bedroom.

"The palace takes the place of the cell, and I observe the two things, so entirely dissimilar, which remind me of everything I love.

"This lane is the convent, that is you, and this elegant boudoir I merely owe to my mother.

"I feel happy at knowing I am so loved, and I sigh slightly when I think I cannot unite this double love about me.

" 'You think then, Cyprienne, that it will please you here?' she asked.

"If it will please me! You can imagine, Ursula, that I did not hesitate long with my answer.

"'And will you love us?' asked my mother again. 'Yes,' she added after a pause, 'I can see that you will love us; and yet, dear child, how much injury have we done to you, and how much will we perhaps still do to you.'

"Mothers, Ursula, have also the power of making themselves young again.

"When a mother loves, she is a child, when she rocks her daughter, a little girl; when she amuses her, a young girl, when she desires to make her smile she is the same age as her daughter.

"After dinner my mother became grave.

"She presented my maid, who is named Postel, to me, but only for form's sake, for she declared her intention to wait upon me herself this evening.

"When I had retired she took a seat at the edge of my bed.

"'Cyprienne,' she said in a grave voice, 'we have not yet spoken of your father. What do you think of him?'

"'I think I respect him, mamma, and love him as much as I can.'

"'That is right, Cyprienne,' continued my mother, 'love him dearly, so that he loves you a little, and respect him still more, for he is one of the noblest men whom you will ever meet. If you notice a few faults in him, do not judge him too quickly, for who knows but what your sentence might react upon another person, who perhaps stands nearer to you. Obey him in everything, my daughter, for he is in a double way master of your destiny. He has the right to decide about it, for he is your father; but he also has this right, because I have since a long time resigned the power I could have over you into his hands. I will not, I dare not command you, I only want—'

"She suddenly paused and then continued:

" 'To be loved by you.'

"Here was the secret which we had divined in the convent.

"It lay between my father and my mother.

"Ah, could I have wished to be the judge between them?

"No, it was better that I should never know the reason why a difference had arisen between them.

"Is it not rather a more natural duty for me to bring them together, by seeking their love?

"This has already been done with regard to my mother.

"With regard to my father, I imagine it will not be impossible.

"Just as my mother was about to go away, we heard a soft knock at the door.

"My mother went and opened it.

" 'Is it you!' she exclaimed in surprise.

" 'Can I come in?' asked the voice of my father. 'What, already to bed! I am very sorry, but I ought to have my daughter to myself a minute, Hortense, after you have had her the whole evening.'

"My mother was so dazed that she could not answer.

" 'In fact,' continued my father, 'Cyprienne is as much my daughter as yours.'

"He seated himself at the head of my bed and said:

" 'Well, how do you like it here? Better than in your convent, I believe. How shall we make her forget her nuns, Hortense? The dressmaker will be here soon, won't she?'

" 'To-morrow, Loredan,' replied my mother.

" 'That is right!' exclaimed my father.

"He spoke a long time in a loving strain, though to my mind it was rather too free.

"The gentle, quiet nature of my mother was more pleasant to me than his witty remarks.

"Finally he noticed that I was getting sleepy, and went away with mamma.

"I was half asleep, but my father's words continued to ring in my ears.

" 'How shall we make her forget the convent?'

"Only then it occurred to me that I had already forgotten it.

"I had forgotten to pray.

"I quickly sprang out of bed, knelt on the carpet, and prayed for you, Ursula, for the good sisters, for my gentle, melancholy mother, for my father, and also for myself.

" 'Oh,' I said to myself, 'it will bring me misfortune; on the very first night I pass in my father's house, I forgot to pray and thank God.'

CHAPTER IV

THE RICHEST AND MOST UPRIGHT MAN IN FRANCE

[*From the Blue Diary*]

"IT WAS my maid who woke me up next morning. The moment I opened my eyes, she was already in my room and putting everything in order without making more noise than a shadow.

"She thought I was still asleep, and I took advantage of the fact to observe her attentively.

"She pleased me very much.

"She is a little woman, about forty years of age, as quick as a squirrel and skilful as a fay.

"Her life has been, it seems, up till now, very unhappy; but as my good mamma forbade me ever to question the woman, I shall take care not to do it.

"I sighed aloud to have her know that I was awake.

"Postel immediately hurried toward me.

"'Do you want anything, mademoiselle?' she asked. 'Do you want to get up? Shall I throw the curtains aside?'

"Mademoiselle sprang out of bed just as in the convent, and made her own toilet.

"I had to have my hair made though, and Postel was very skilful in doing it.

"While she was busy with me, she spoke of my mother, and declared that she was a saint, an angel, whom every one loved and admired.

"You can imagine how pleased I was to hear this. I liked her the more now since I knew how much she loved my mother.

"Hardly was I dressed than a timid knock was heard at the door. Postel went out and immediately returned again.

" 'The count desires to know, mademoiselle, whether you will receive him. He awaits you in the parlor.'

"I hurried there and found my father looking out of the window.

"His forehead was wrinkled, and his glance was abstracted.

"He turned around at the rustling of my dress.

"The frown disappeared when he saw me, and I saw the smile of yesterday reappear.

" 'Good-morning, Cypri,' he said; 'I come to ask you to invite me to breakfast. Do you want me to be your guest?'

" 'Yes, papa, if you desire it, with the greatest pleasure.

"My father rang the bell, and Postel brought the breakfast on a tray—milk, butter, cake, and chocolate.

"Postel put the tray on the table and waited.

" 'We will serve ourselves,' said my father, laughing, 'or rather I will serve you alone, for I have something to say to you.'

"These words were addressed more to Postel than to me, for she made a courtesy and left the room.

" 'My dear Cyprienne,' continued my father, after the servant had gone, 'you are about to enter a world entirely

new to you, and I must prepare you for your *debut*, so that you will not appear awkward.'

"I did not consider myself obliged to answer the question.

"My father continued:

" 'It is not a question of the way you dress yourself. But you must know who the persons are with whom you will come in contact, so that you will not deceive yourself in regard to them. As to the ladies and young girls of your age, your mother will inform you about that better than I can. I will, therefore, only concern myself with the men whom you will see here; that is, with gentlemen of our own acquaintance.'

"He named a whole collection of diplomats, generals, artists, and others, in such a piquant and witty way that I almost died of laughing.

"Sometimes he interrupted himself to make observations as follows:

" 'You must understand, Cyprienne, that what I am telling you is what every one must know, but none dare repeat. Society is full of snares. Make use of what I tell you.'

"Among the portraits he sketched to me, there were two which struck me, probably because my father lingered longer over them.

"They were Colonel Fritz, his intimate friend, and Baron Matifay, whose name, it seems, is known to the whole world.

" 'This man,' said my father, 'is a famous banker, and his life is a proof of the possibility of the paradoxical proverb: "Honesty is the most skilful way of cheating." This phenomenal business man, the most upright and

richest man in France, came here from Limoges, just like Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, only this time Monsieur de Pourceaugnac is a genius, and instead of letting Paris laugh at him, he conquers it.'

"In this equivocal tone my father continued to speak.

"I believe he does not like this baron whom he praises; yet I think he is forced to respect him.

"One thing alone he cannot forgive him—his birth and his newly baked baronetcy.

"I must tell you a passage in the life of this Baron Matifay which just comes to my mind.

"Every one has heard of the Countess of Quisran-Rancogne, who poisoned her husband, and whose trial was the great sensation of the time.

"Monsieur Matifay was at that time interested in the iron works of Noirmont. The countess left a little daughter, whose guardian Monsieur Matifay became.

"It happened then that the iron works, which were managed by a relative of the Countess of Rancogne, Hercules Champion, did a poor business; bankruptcy followed, and Champion fled to a foreign country, leaving an enormous deficit behind.

"This meant for little Blanche poverty, and for Matifay almost total ruin, for he lost the fruits of twenty years' labor.

"But the brave fellow did not lose courage, or desert the poor orphan, who became in consequence of Champion's flight his daughter.

"Matifay had the courage to risk his last savings. He bought the ruined iron works, had half of it recorded in his ward's name, and energetically went to work.

"The first year he paid a dividend to the creditors.

"The bankruptcy had every evidence of being a fraudulent one, yet the proofs were not sufficient to secure Champion's conviction.

"When people saw that the iron works were in the hands of such a shrewd and scrupulously honest man, confidence was restored and credit given.

"Noirmont became an establishment of the first rank.

"In the midst of this prosperity a great misfortune happened to Matifay.

"He loved his little Blanche as if she were his own daughter.

"Unfortunately she was ill and feeble, and her strength diminished every day.

"The doctor who was called in was astonished to discover symptoms of that disease of the soul on which incurable despair gnaws.

"The secret of this despair was only known on her death-bed.

"In spite of the anxious watchfulness of her guardian, the unhappy child had learned, through a servant, of the terrible crime its mother had committed.

"Its soul was wounded, and this wound was too deep and burning for the poor, small, weak body.

"Matifay engaged the most celebrated physicians, among others Dr. Ozam, and offered them immense sums if they saved his darling.

"A voyage to the south was recommended.

"In Naples the poor child breathed its last in its guardian's arms.

"Monsieur Matifay returned home alone and low-spirited from the journey, and tried to deaden his grief by feverish activity.

"He did not succeed, for everything about him recalled to his heart the angel who had left this earth forever.

"He sold the iron works of Noirmont, and founded a hospital with the money he had intended to give his ward.

"He then migrated to a northern department, and began the gigantic transactions which have brought him in his present enormous fortune.

"'And this,' I said to my father, after he had finished his story, 'this is the man you dare to mock at?'

"I was really indignant, the story having made a deep impression upon me.

"My father smilingly listened to me, and when I had finished he exclaimed:

"'You speak without thinking, my love. Never forget that enthusiasm is only injurious in this world. If you admire a thing too much, you indirectly confess your own incompetence to do it, and in the society in which you are destined to live, the first virtue is, that you must never admit the superiority of any one over you, in matters of beauty, fortune, or intelligence.'

"While my father was giving me this little scolding, he nevertheless looked at me in such a way as if he were perfectly well satisfied with me.

"'Since you love your Matifay so much,' he added, 'we will not permit ourselves any longer to look upon his new baked baronetcy as a ridiculous thing.'

"Just then my mother and Postel entered the room.

"They were accompanied by a dressmaker, a Madame Rozel, and brought a number of boxes along.

"This invasion induced my father to beat a retreat.

"'I have given you your first society lesson, little Cypri,' he said, 'here comes the second, and I am convinced that it will please you more.'

"The second lesson pleased me in fact much better.

"I had to try on dresses and hats, and select colors. Mamma says that I have a great deal of taste.

"I must tell you about two more persons, and then I am finished.

"First, I shall mention Colonel Fritz, my father's intimate friend, and the aristocratic foreign lady about whom all Paris is now talking.

"My father hardly told me more than two or three words about the colonel; his intimate friendship with him made me curious, and I could not help asking my mother about it.

"It seemed to cause her great excitement, and she only answered:

"'The colonel is your father's friend, Cyprienne.'

"I observed at once that this friend of my father's was in no sense that of my mother, and I determined to watch the colonel at the dinner-table.

"He dines almost every day at our house.

"Colonel Fritz seems to me to be a very polite man, though somewhat cold.

"He is lean, tall, very elegantly dressed. and still looks young, although he is over forty.

"He is said to have only one fault.

"The men maintain that he does not play high enough, although I do not see anything objectionable in that.

"He is supposed to have thirty thousand francs income.

"I confess he interests and troubles me at the same time.

"His coldness toward me is marvellous, although he is always polite and attentive.

"Five or six times I caught him looking stealthily at me.

"What lies in those looks?

"Hate, pity, or contempt, or, on the contrary, jealous affection? I do not know. It would be just as difficult for me to describe my own feelings toward him.

"I think his face handsome, but cold; his voice is agreeable, but so sharp and precise that it seems to cut like a sword.

"When he enters I do not need to see him. Even without looking in the mirror I divine his presence, and my heart is drawn together at his approach.

"I am positive that this man will have a great influence upon my life."

CHAPTER V

THE INVITATION TO DANCE

[*From the Blue Diary*]

"URSULA! Ursula! the good sisters were right. The world is something terrible.

"Ah, we would have done much better if we had stayed there, in the lonely shadows, far from the temptations and trials—or rather—

"But will you understand what I am about to say to you?

"Oh, now where my eyes are dazzled by this brilliancy, where my ears are lulled by this music, where my heart is moved by these flattering speeches, I feel that a return is impossible.

"And yet fear fills me to my inmost soul.

"That light, that torch which is called society, and which is described to us as being so dangerous, I saw to-night for the first time.

"In my eyes the dazzling glare of the chandeliers still beams, the silk dresses surround me, and the diamonds glisten.

"Ah, Ursula, you have no idea how beautiful it is!

"At first I thought I was in fairyland, in those regions which one only sees in dreams.

"Everywhere flowers, everywhere gas jets, and the

women looked like goddesses who decorate themselves with stars.

"I leaned heavily on the arm of Colonel Fritz, who was my cavalier. I feared I would faint.

"Suddenly I saw through a fog which seemed to consist of sun-dust, a woman coming toward me, who was more beautiful and majestic than any of the others.

"It was the mistress of the house in which the ball took place, the Countess of Monte-Cristo.

"She took my hand.

"What did she say to me?

"I should not be frightened, and I was not frightened any more.

"The Countess of Monte-Cristo had the kindness to let me seat myself between her and my mother.

"I was still too excited and uneasy to be able to remember everything she said to me. I only know she made me a few compliments about my dress and my agreeable presence.

"I, however, whose chief fault is not modesty, and who look upon myself as being rather pretty, was ashamed, for I found the countess to be a thousand times more beautiful than I am.

"All eyes were turned toward us. The countess was so kind as to express the opinion that it was on my account, and repeated it so often that I finally believed it myself.

"Ah, my good Ursula, vanity is an ugly fault, but I assure you it gives great pleasure.

"A perfect procession passed in front of us.

"The Countess of Monte-Cristo had a friendly word for every one. Later on she introduced me. I stam-

mered, and my mother blushed with pleasure at my success.

"In the meantime the orchestra had begun to play.

" 'There!' said the Countess of Monte-Cristo, with a merry twinkle of the eye, 'these little feet move themselves as if they wished to become transformed into wings. We need a dancer.'

"It was in vain I asserted that I could not dance and did not wish to dance. The countess asked a young man who was about to leave us, after having greeted us, to stay, and introduced him to me with the words:

" 'The Vicomte de la Cruz.'

"This young man pleased me at once.

"He is very handsome, and does not seem to know it himself; a trifle melancholy, which suits his brown complexion very well, though a soft smile plays about his lips.

"You will tell me that I paid too much attention to him for a first introduction.

"I must reply to this that a stolen look from under the eyelids ought to satisfy a shrewd girl, and that I had plenty of time besides to analyze the advantages of my hero, for I had the honor of dancing with him.

"Yes, dear friend, I have danced, and it is not so difficult an art as I had imagined.

"The Countess of Monte-Cristo was right. The feet of young girls are wings which they themselves do not know. Yet I did not dance at first.

"Although the Vicomte de la Cruz asked me to dance with him and I consented, the Countess of Monte-Cristo, noticing my embarrassment, gave me time to collect myself, by postponing the dance with my cavalier until later on in the evening.

"The vicomte bowed in token of acquiescence, and went away with the gravity of a Cid in a frock coat.

"As soon as he was gone I heaped reproaches upon my mother and the Countess of Monte-Cristo. They both laughed at me, especially the latter.

" 'Confess, my dear child,' she said, 'that you desire to dance, and that only false shame keeps you back. That is why I selected a cavalier for you whose like is seldom found. There are a great many young and aristocratic ladies who will envy you this cavalier.'

"She was silent for a moment and then continued:

" 'The vicomte is too grave to hop around like an eighteen-year-old boy. This is the first time that I have seen him hurt his dignity in this way, and you can pride yourself on the fact of being the first one in my parlor who has transferred a hero into a dancer for the time being.'

" 'A hero, madame?' I asked.

" 'Yes, my child, a hero,' she replied; 'perhaps it will once be permitted a poor old woman to tell you and the rest of the world who the Vicomte de la Cruz really is, and what a self-sacrificing heart beats in his breast. At present I can only repeat the words which surprised you: he is a hero!'

"I was silent, for I saw that the countess desired to say something more:

" 'If a man,' she continued, after a short pause, 'combines self-sacrifice with courage, if a knight, a saint and a virtuous man were rolled into one, representing that sublime being which is called a hero, then the Vicomte de la Cruz is such a one.'

"At this moment the vicomte returned to us.

"He was very pale, but not a line of his proud, calm face had changed.

"I arose.

"'But what do you want, Cyprienne?' cried my mother, 'you promised a quadrille, and what the orchestra is playing now is a waltz.'

"'That makes no difference,' said the Countess of Monte-Cristo, laughing. 'Quadrille or waltz is all the same. In this way, Mademoiselle Cyprienne, who is still a beginner, will not confuse the figures.'

"The vicomte placed the tips of his fingers to mine.

"The orchestra played that charming waltz: 'The Invitation to the Dance.'

"I placed my hand on the shoulder of my partner, he grazed my waist slightly with his hand, and we whirled around the room.

"At this moment I felt that there could not be a greater happiness for a woman than to be supported by a strong arm and a courageous heart.

"The vicomte's heart is brave, his arm strong. I knew that I could confidently lean upon his shoulder. In a word I was happy!

"I look upon my partner as a hero, dear Ursula; as a hero!

"But just then my hero did not open his lips, yet I divined he had something to say to me.

"I feared to ask him what it was, yet I wished to know what it was.

"He did not speak, however.

"Just as the music ceased, and he led me back to my seat, he whispered a few words in my ear, which almost took away my senses.

"'Be on your guard, mademoiselle!' he said, 'a great danger is threatening you!'

"And while I was standing all in a tremble, thinking every minute I would faint, he held me up with his hand and added:

"'Your friends are watching; assist them.'

"We had returned to the Countess of Monte-Cristo. Without adding a word the vicomte bowed and went away.

"'Your father, my dear child,' said the Countess of Monte-Cristo to me, 'is taking a walk through the parlors with your mother. Will you permit me to be your governess meanwhile?'

"Hardly had I signified my consent, than my mother, leaning on the arm of my father, returned.

"The latter seemed to be in ill-humor. I only heard the end of the conversation he was having with my mother.

"'The matter must be brought to an end,' he said, 'and since you will not speak with her, then I shall do so.'

"When he saw me he paused, and immediately began to smile in his accustomed way.

"I imagined that they had been talking about me, and that their conversation had a connection with the vicomte's warning.

"'A great danger threatens you!' he had said.

"A great danger!

"From my father, the natural protector whom God had given to me?

"What madness!

"The ball came to an end.

"Under the awning I saw the face of Colonel Fritz.

" 'Wait for me,' my father called to him; 'I am going along.'

"My father, in fact, only accompanied us to the coach, closed the door of the same, and said to the coachman:

" 'To the house!'

"He then ascended the porch again, and I saw him address the colonel, and speak eagerly to him.

"I am positive they spoke about me.

"Mamma held her handkerchief to her eyes, and two or three times I thought she was crying.

" 'What ails you? What is the matter with you, mamma?' I asked her, at length.

"She did not answer, but only seized my hand and pressed it to her bosom.

"When we arrived at home she feverishly kissed me, and I felt my face wet with tears.

" 'Cyprienne! Cyprienne! you must obey your father!'

"This was all my mother could say to me; and, instead of accompanying me to my room, as was her custom, she went to her own and locked herself in.

"What was the meaning of the warning? What was the cause of these tears?

"What should I do?

"Whom should I confide in?

"My mother admonishes me to obey; but what makes her cry when she gives me the order?

"Ah! why are you not here, Ursula? Why are you not with me? Your friendship would enlighten me, you would counsel me, and you would support and defend me.

"This parental home to which I was so anxious to

return is full of snares. I fear that my father is my greatest enemy. My mother suffers as much as I do, but she remains neutral; and the only person in whom I place entire confidence, the only one who I believe is able to save me, is a stranger.

"I am so unhappy, so sad; I feel so lonely, so indifferent to everything around me.

"I think I shall become insane.

"I had just closed my blue diary and was about to retire.

"I was already half undressed, and opened my jewel-case to put in my rings and earrings.

"What do you think I found in it?

"A note which contained only one line:

" 'A great danger threatens you. Your friends watch. Assist them.'

"How did this note get there?

"Who are the mysterious friends who come into my room and write down the same words which the Vicomte de la Cruz whispered in my ear?

"My friends! May they not be enemies, who conceal themselves under the mask of friendship to harm me the more? I am sure of the vicomte. A person cannot lie with a face and look like his.

"And why should he deceive me?

"Ah, if he lied to me, if the fear which tortures me was only a smart trick of his, then he would be the most contemptible man living.

" 'A great danger threatens you. Your friends watch. Assist them.' "

CHAPTER VI

THE ORGY

AT THE very hour Cyprienne wrote down her impressions in her blue diary, a scene of a different kind took place in a little house in the neighborhood of the Barriere Pigalle.

This vicinity, which is now entirely built up, consisted, at that time, of a great plain and a few large gardens.

At the rear of one of these gardens sat Colonel Fritz and his friend, Count Loredan de Puysaie.

Ten or twelve guests of both sexes are assembled here.

The dinner is nearing its end, and the champagne bubbles in the crystal glass.

The queen of the table was Nini Moustache, one of those celebrated women whose fame lasts as long as their complexion remains fresh—that is a few days, a few months, or perhaps a few years.

Count de Puysaie was madly in love with her.

It would be hard to find a more fascinating and charming creature than she was.

She looked like an antique Venus formed of living marble, and was the incarnation of vice.

Her only rival was the blond Aurelie, sometimes called Monte-Cristo.

We have already spoken of the resemblance which gave her this sobriquet.

Aurelie was not present this evening.

The gentlemen were entirely drunk, and the odalisques half.

Just as the dinner ended in an orgy, the orgy ended in a bacchanalian revel.

The ladies began to sing songs.

Loredan, with an expression of disgust on his face, rose up from his seat.

"Come, let us go," he said to Colonel Fritz.

The more they sang, the more they screamed, the louder they laughed, the more he was seized by an irresistible sadness, which was, perhaps, remorse.

Between him and these Phrynes there stood now—the picture of Cyprienne.

The picture of his daughter Cyprienne, who was now slumbering in her virgin bed, and who had, no doubt, before going to sleep prayed for him. He threw an angry look at Colonel Fritz, and muttered between his teeth:

"Suppose he deceived me anyhow! Suppose Cyprienne is really my daughter?"

Colonel Fritz pretended not to have heard the count's demand.

"Come, let us go!" repeated the Count of Puysaie, shaking him by the shoulder.

The colonel turned around like a wild animal and looked angrily at the count.

For a second the eyes of the two men crossed each other.

"Come, let us go!" said the count for the third time.

Colonel Fritz got up with difficulty and followed the count without making any remark.

At the foot of the porch a carriage awaited them.

Nini was used to the humors of her master.

This strong girl abhorred any weakness. She pursed her lips, shrugged her shoulders, and murmured:

"What is the use of his running away? He will come again to-morrow."

Then she sighed and added:

"Ah, why does he not stay away altogether?"

On the way the coach of the Count of Puysaie met another one coming up the courtyard, and a few minutes later the handsome Aurelie entered the dining-room.

The resemblance between her and the Countess of Monte-Cristo was striking, yet upon a closer examination there were many points of difference between them.

They were both, for instance, blond; but while the hair of the countess softened her majestic features, the blond tresses of Aurelie gave a wild passionate reflex to her face.

They both were majestically handsome, the countess in the style of the first Christian empresses, while Aurelie reminded one of a Faustina or Messalina.

Their voices showed the same similarity, and the same difference.

When Nina Moustache saw her friend enter, she hurried to meet her.

"Ah, there you are at last, Aurelie! I feared you would not come."

"Oh," replied Aurelie, in a low voice, "why should I stay away when you write to me: 'I am suffering!' "

"You can speak louder," replied Nini, with a bitter smile, "these people are unable to listen and understand what we say. Just look at them!"

With outstretched hand she contemptuously pointed to those about her.

Some uttered a hoarse laugh, others tried to sing, but could not, and others again slept with their heads in the tablecloth.

"Come," said Nini to Aurelie, "the sight of these people fills me with disgust."

On a cushioned bench in an antechamber, a lackey lay sleeping.

Nini awoke him.

"When these gentlemen ring," she said, "have their carriages ride up."

She then led Aurelie through a second door, which she locked from the inside.

The room into which the two ladies entered was a large bedroom.

Everything in it was magnificent and gloomy, just like the inmate of the place, the majestic form where the soul was missing.

Nini Moustache threw herself on a divan and sobbed bitterly.

Aurelie, standing upright and motionless, gazed at her.

"Ah!" cried Nini, at length, as she hurriedly rose up again, "that is what we make of those we love! Fools or lunatics! Have you never felt it?" she asked, turning to Aurelie, "have you never bled yourself out of the wounds you gave your admirers? Have you never wrung your hands in anguish when you thought of their trials? Have you never cursed your own fate?"

Aurelie slowly shook her head.

"Never!" she said.

"Ah, you are strong!" murmured Nini. "I wish I could be like you!"

She paused for a while, then continued:

"You are right in the end—eye for eye, tooth for tooth, shame for shame."

Aurelie did not reply to this tirade.

She slowly approached her friend, who had fallen back on the divan again, and placed her cold hand on Nini's bare arm.

"What did you want to tell me?" she asked.

"I? Nothing. Yes, so I did. I wanted to tell you that I suffer," replied Nini. "I am not strong and brave like you. When a person implores me, I smile, when he sobs, I laugh, but the comedy is a torture to me and you see how I pay for it."

Aurelie made a gesture of impatience.

"If you do not want to tell me anything, then I shall go," she said.

"No, no, stay, I beg you!"

As Nini said this she took Aurelie's hand and forced her to sit down again.

"Do not leave me alone," she continued, "I need courage and consolation. The Count of Puysaie has a wife who is said to be a saint and a hundred times handsomer than we are. His wife is my enemy and I am jealous of her. I love the man I ruin. I love him on account of his weakness; I love him for the grief he suffers and of which I am the cause. He sacrificed his wife for me, and committed a great wrong in doing so. She is better than I am, she might have saved him. He has a daughter though, a

girl, sixteen years old, and he will sacrifice her for me to-morrow."

Aurelie shrugged her shoulders.

"Yes," continued Nini, "I understand you. What odds does it make? is what you want to say. I thought so too at first. I was so sold, why should I not sell her? I wished to see her though; I was so foolish as to have her pointed out to me in the Champs-Elysees. Ah, Aurelie, she is an angel with blond hair and a smile!"

Nini Moustache held her hand before her eyes as if dazzled, and for a while was silent.

Then she began again:

"The poor, innocent child! What a terrible thing it is that a creature like me should have the fate of such a being in my hands! No, God is not a just God!"

"But what about the crime of which you spoke?" asked Aurelie, looking sharply at Nini. "Who forces you to commit it?"

"Who, do you ask?" replied Nini. "Must I tell you everything? Who? Who else but those devils who plunged me, too, into iniquity—the purveyors of the morgues, the prisons and the hospitals!"

"And can you not resist?"

"I can do nothing. The Count of Puysaie is ruined. The happiness of his daughter is to be sacrificed, and I have been the instrument selected to accomplish it!"

At the last words Nini Moustache arose and strode up and down the room.

"Listen!" she began again. "You shall learn all. I will tell you aloud what I feared to say in the solitude of my soul. But I beg you in advance—not a word, no

ironical comments, none of those cold-blooded mockeries which are usual with you."

As she said this she blew out the candle, so that the room was suddenly enveloped in darkness.

"Now I shall begin," continued Nini Moustache. "Do not interrupt me. Listen to me, or else go to sleep, if you feel like it."

CHAPTER VII

NINI'S CONFESSION

"WHEN I was still a little girl," began Nini Moustache, "I was called by a name which I cannot hear now without shuddering.

"It is a simple, plain name, but for me it is the only trace of a distant past, which cannot be recalled again; the memory of my father's house, my innocence, and my hopes.

"I was called Celine.

"Celine is dead now, and only a single person, Nini Moustache, thinks of her still.

"My father was a watchmaker's assistant. My mother I never knew. She died in childbirth; my father was so good, however, that I did not feel the loss of a mother.

"When I grew up my father intrusted the care of the household to me, and also the supervision over my sister, Ursula.

"I dressed her and took her out for a walk, I did the cooking, and mended the clothes, while my father with his only apprentice repaired the watches of the neighborhood.

"We were not rich, but we were above want, and were consequently happy.

"My father's apprentice was named Louis Jacquemin.

"He was of the same age as I, well educated, and the son of a widow who lived in the same house as we did, and was our only society. Louis was intelligent and industrious. My father already thought of the time when he could leave him his business and his daughter.

"I loved Louis very much, although he was still very young, and I looked like a little woman.

"About this time my father made the acquaintance of a young man, who had rented a miserable little attic room from the janitor of the house for six francs a month.

"His general appearance and manners showed that he was of good birth, but none of us inquired his name, which he undoubtedly concealed through pride.

"He only admitted that he belonged to an honorable and rich family and that his parents were opposed to his becoming an actor, leaving him to choose between poverty and giving up his plan.

"He did not hesitate long, but through respect for his family he had given himself a false name—Florestan.

"His distinguished appearance, his theatrical gestures, and the mystery surrounding him, proved so irresistibly attractive to me that I succumbed.

"From that time on I looked upon household duties as slavery.

"I possessed only one virtue—a mother heart, if I may use the word, for I loved my little Ursula, my sister, like a mother does her first-born child.

"Ah, this love, which could have saved me, only served to plunge me deeper in misfortune!

"Jacquemin alone mistrusted Florestan.

"Afraid that a scene would open the eyes of my father, I became a hypocrite.

"I made out that I was deeply in love with my intended.

"The poor fellow allowed himself to be deceived, and my father began to think of preparing for our marriage.

"Dresses were bought, the bridal wreath and the furniture for the new household. The wedding-day was fixed, the banns published, and a week before the intended wedding, on the very day I reached my majority, I eloped with Florestan.

"We went to Brussels, where Florestan met a friend named Legigant, who loaned him a large sum of money.

"Later on I learned, to my sorrow, in what relation Florestan stood to his friend.

"I need not say that I soon broke off with Florestan, or who his successor was.

"When I left Monsieur Legigant and returned to Paris, the vicious life I led was continued on a grander scale.

"One night—or, rather, morning, for the night had long since turned into day—I staggered out of one of the large boulevard restaurants.

"Suddenly, and just as I was about to get into a passing hack, I heard a voice say behind me, in a commanding tone:

"'Celine!'

"As if struck by lightning, I turned around and saw Louis Jacquemin standing in front of me.

"Great God! how he had changed!

"He was pale, lean, and a hectic flush was on his cheeks.

"Jacquemin had ordered a coach to stop, seized me by the arms and forced me to get in.

"I did not try to resist.

"He got in after me, took a seat beside me, and gave the coachman the number and street of my father's house.

"I, trembling, waited for Louis to address me.

"He remained gloomy and silent.

"He did not seem to want to reproach or scold me.

"As I could not stand this silence any longer, I resolved to speak to him.

" 'How is my father?' I asked.

" 'He is dead.'

"A pause ensued, and I did not dare to break the silence again.

"The coach stopped in front of my former residence.

"Louis paid the coachman, let me step in the hallway, and went up the stairs as far as the door of the room I had formerly occupied.

"He knocked on the door, the rustling of a dress was heard, and Madame Jacquemin opened it.

" 'Here she is!' he said to his mother, as he pushed me across the threshold.

" 'Ah, unhappy child!' she exclaimed.

"Louis's mother weepingly made a sign, and a person, whose presence in the room I had not observed as I entered, came forward.

"Two arms—two small, feeble child's arms—were clasped about my neck.

"I raised up my head and recognized Ursula, my sister, my daughter!

" 'Don't you know me any more, Ursula?' I asked.

"She raised her eyes toward me, but did not answer.

" 'Don't you remember your Celine any more?' asked Madame Jacquemin.

"The little one smiled.

" 'Celine is dead,' she replied, 'papa told me so. Celine, besides, was not such a well-dressed lady.'

"And as Ursula said this, she pointed with her fingers to my velvet dress, my laces, and my diamonds.

"My despair awoke again, and I exclaimed:

" 'She is right, Celine is dead!' "

CHAPTER VIII

LOUIS JACQUEMIN

"CELINE is dead!

"Yes, Celine was dead! Only Nini Moustache still lived.

"I arose to leave this house, which was no longer my own, forever.

"Madame Jacquemin kept me back.

"She told me my father had forgiven me.

"Does not a father always forgive?

"He had left me and my sister a small legacy, the fruit of his toil.

"I did not wish to touch this sacred money, but left my share to little Ursula.

"We agreed to leave my sister under Madame Jacquemin's care, and the worthy woman promised to be a mother to her.

"Finally, they permitted me to leave.

"The very next day, or, rather, on the evening of that day, I resumed my usual life.

"My life, though, from now on, had a gloomy witness, who never left me.

"No matter where I was—in the restaurant, at the ball, in theatre—everywhere I saw Louis.

"Every time I saw him again, he was paler and more haggard.

"Gradually his clothes became rags. His honest, industrious poverty turned to dirty misery.

"One day I noticed that he was very drunk. In the same ratio that I sunk lower he sunk lower.

"A few months later I received a letter from his mother which explained the transformation his character had undergone.

"Just after Louis had found me again only to lose me, he had become low-spirited, neglected his work, came home late at night, and very often intoxicated.

"His mother timidly reproached him, but that only made him rude to her.

"The poor woman gave up her last few savings to him, and only ate dry bread, while her son got drunk.

"When she told him next day that she had nothing more, he demanded Ursula's little capital.

"The unfortunate mother would have given her own blood to satisfy the wishes of her son, but she defended the legacy of the poor orphan with the courage of a lioness.

"All this Madame Jacquemin wrote me.

"She closed with a wish that I would take Ursula away from her, as she had resolved to go out to service to support her son.

"This child was the only being who had not become ruined or unhappy through me.

"That was why I sent my sister to a convent in the country.

"I introduced myself there as Madame Morel, and gave the lady-superior, to whom I confessed my real position,

the few thousand francs which constituted the whole fortune of the little one.

"After this was done, and my mind was eased with regard to my sister, I plunged again headlong into the seething vortex of vice.

"At a public ball I saw my evil genius Florestan again.

"He was not the same though.

"The eight years which had passed since our separation had forced him up in the social scale.

"He bowed to his companion, and whispered a few words in his ear.

"Of course he spoke of me, for the other looked at me and answered the colonel in the same way."

"The colonel! Colonel Fritz?" Aurelie asked, interrupting her friend's recital.

"Yes," replied Nini Moustache, briefly; "Count de Puysaie—for he it was who accompanied Colonel Fritz—accosted me shortly afterward.

"He pleased me very much. Later on the colonel joined us, and, at a moment when the Count of Puysaie could not hear us, he whispered in my ear·

" 'He must love you.'

"Thinking it but a joke, I replied:

" 'That would please me first rate.'

"And, in fact, to his misfortune, Count de Puysaie fell in love with me.

"A few weeks later I received a letter from Legigant.

" 'Do you want to ruin the Count de Puysaie,' he said to me, 'and receive the lion's share of the spoils? The count is weak, and you are smart, dear child.'

"In this way I was led into the terrible plot.

"One day I tried to throw off Legigant's yoke.

"That day was the one on which the marriage of Mademoiselle de Puysaie was first spoken of.

"My tyrant frowned, and said with the same cold voice which penetrates to the soul:

" 'By the way, Madame Morel, you are aware no doubt that your cousin Ursula is at present in Paris? Her education is finished, and you wrote to the lady superior to return the young girl to you. The little white pigeon is working in one of the largest dressmaking establishments in Paris, and I guarantee you she will go the straight road. I am a good protector, and the libertine who would dare to harm this girl would fare badly at my hands.'

"When Legigant saw the effect of this unexpected announcement upon me, he added:

" 'Yes, yes! You want Ursula to remain a good girl. It shall be done. I have promised to aid and protect her. But this aid and protection will only be given to your sister as long as you keep our contract. You know that I keep my promise; but I tell you in advance that I shall not allow myself to be fooled. Now you know all!'

"Yes, now I knew all.

"My slavery was complete, my will broken. From that time on I was Legigant's tool.

"My sister would have to bear the consequences were I to revolt against this terrible lord and master.

"I must lead a constant life of shame, to preserve the purity of the only honorable corner of my soul."

Nini Moustache had completed her story.

She paused, and, exhausted by the painful disclosures she had made, she sank back in her chair.

Suddenly she felt two hot lips press her forehead, and a voice murmured:

"Courage, courage, my sister! Believe, hope, and you will be saved!"

Nini hurriedly raised herself up to demand a clearer explanation, but her hand only moved through empty space, without touching anything.

She ran to the window and drew the curtains aside.

Aurelie was no longer there, but when Nini put her hand to her cheek, she felt a warm dew, a tear!

Aurelie hurried through the dining-room, which was empty now, and found her coach, which awaited her under the awning.

A quarter of an hour later, she got out in front of her residence, at the corner of the Chaussee d'Antin and the Rue de Provence, and the heavy doors of the courtyard closed behind her.

If any one had waited half an hour under her window, he would have seen a side door in the Rue de Provence noiselessly open.

A woman, whose head was enveloped in a hood, and who looked like the wife of a wealthy citizen, stepped out.

She walked a few steps up the street, then paused as if waiting for some one.

A little while later she was joined by a young man dressed like a workman, and they both strode arm in arm toward the boulevard.

At the end of the boulevard, the curious couple turned into the Rue Vivienne.

The woman remained standing in front of a store on which was a sign in gold letters: "Madame Rozel, Modiste."

She put a key she carried in her hand into the lock,

but did not open the door at once, continuing her conversation a few minutes longer.

"We are agreed then," she said at length.

"Yes," replied her companion, "we shall find out who this Legigant is."

"Good."

A small, round, white hand appeared from under the cloak, and the workman grasped it with a certain affectionate respect.

"Good-night, Joseph."

"Good-night, Helene."

And the door of the store closed behind the woman.

The workman continued on his way.

He paused in front of a tavern near the market. A man stood at the bar drinking.

He was a pale, lean man, who looked older than he really was, his black hair alone betraying his youth.

Joseph walked up to him.

"You are drinking again, Jacquemin! Did you not promise me not to do it again?"

"Yes, it is true, Monsieur Joseph," replied the other in a stammering way; "but custom is stronger than I am, and besides, I met the unfortunate again, yesterday."

"An honest man must keep his word," said Joseph. "Put your glass away."

Jacquemin looked longingly at the glass of brandy and with a great effort poured the contents on the floor.

Joseph, with a smile on his face, watched him.

"That's right," he then said; "now come with me. I want you to give me some information."

They both went away in the direction of the Rue Rambuteau.

"Here we are," said Joseph, as he pointed to the door of a house; "try to find out where Legigant can be seen. As soon as you have any news for me, come here. By the way, how are you getting along with Clement?"

Jacquemin hung down his head.

"I see," continued Joseph. "You have taken your wages in advance, or else pawned some things given you to repair."

Jacquemin did not answer, but his embarrassment clearly showed that Joseph was right in his conjectures.

"Go at once to Clement and tell him what you have done," continued Joseph; "that is the only punishment I shall give you. Good-by, my friend."

"Good-by, Monsieur Joseph."

"Do not forget to go to Clement."

At this moment a pretty young working girl, with her basket on her arm, came hurriedly down the stairs of the house.

"You are in great haste, Mademoiselle Ursula," said Joseph, laughing.

"Yes," replied Ursula, "Madame Rozel is very friendly and good, but she wants us all to be punctual. Do not detain me, Monsieur Joseph."

"Oh," replied Joseph, "if I desired, I know a way of detaining you.'

"I do not think so."

"Well, I need say only one word—pronounce one name —Cyprienne!"

Leaving the young girl in a daze, he quickly ascended the stairs.

CHAPTER IX

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

[*From the Blue Diary*]

"I KNOW the danger now which threatens me. The Vicomte de la Cruz was right. It is the greatest misfortune which can happen to a young girl. My father wants me to marry a man I do not love, and never can love.

"This morning Florent, my father's valet, came to my room and asked me to follow him.

"I found my father in his study busy with his mail, which he immediately shoved aside as soon as he saw me enter.

" 'Ah, there you are, Cypri!' he said. 'I did not expect you so soon.'

" 'Is it not my first duty to satisfy your wishes, papa?'

" 'Yes, yes, I know it. You are a good girl. What do you think of your hero?'

"He looked at me with a smile as he said this, and I felt my face flush.

"What folly! I thought he referred to the vicomte.

"I managed to collect myself, and in a quiet tone asked:

" 'What hero do you mean, papa?'

"'Well, who else should I mean but Baron Matifay?'

"This name, which I had hardly expected to hear, lifted a heavy burden from my heart, and I laughingly exclaimed:

"'I must confess I have never thought of the man you mention, but if you desire it, I will do so.'

"'Yes, I desire it,' replied my father, suddenly becoming graver. 'What do you think of him?'

"'He does not please me at all,' I replied, 'he is very old and terribly ugly.'

"'That may be—but also very rich. In fact, Cyprienne, to make a long story short, I desire you to marry your hero, Baron Matifay.'

"'Baron Matifay!'

"'What is there so wonderful in that?' asked my father, noticing my astonishment, 'I know twenty young ladies who will envy you.'

"He said that Baron Matifay was of the stuff out of which cabinet ministers are made; the king had promised to make him a peer; I would be the wife of the richest and most influential man in Paris; the baron would be more of an attentive protector to me than a husband.

"I listened to it all for some time, and then interrupted my father with the words:

"'Can you not see, papa, that you wound my heart with your whole plan? I know very well that you do not love me and never have loved me. What have I done to you that you should act so cruelly toward me? Was it my fault that I was born? Why did you not leave me in my convent? There at least I was loved. You want to banish me again from my parental home, and this time the banishment is a thousand times worse than the first one.'

"I raised my eyes, and when I saw my father's face I was frightened at my own boldness.

"He stood at the table pale as a ghost, and leaned with his fist upon the marble slab.

"I threw myself at his feet and sobbingly implored him to forgive me for the blasphemies I had just uttered.

" 'Cyprienne,' he then said, 'do not let me ever see you again on your knees to me. This theatrical posture is alike humiliating for us both. You have insulted me deeply, my daughter.'

"After my father had said this, he sat down again at the table, and I was forced to follow his example, though I had no appetite for breakfast.

" 'In the first place,' he said, 'you must know that the Countess of Monte-Cristo is not the real name of the lady at whose house you were. What it is, I do not know. Not long ago the Countess of Monte-Cristo, for so we shall call her, was received by their royal majesties. It was noticed that the queen had a long conversation with her. At its conclusion the countess bent her knee and kissed the hand the queen extended to her. Eight days later the countess sent out her invitations, illuminated her parlors, and the cream of Parisian society danced at her house.'

"In this way my father went on, and I eagerly listened to the fable he was telling me, and which has the advantage of all such stories, of being literally true in every particular.

"These proofs of the secret power of the Countess of Monte-Cristo gave me hopes I could not explain.

"Might not she be at the bottom of the help the Vicomte de la Cruz had promised me?

"Might she not be one of the 'friends' who watched?

"When I was alone again, all these consoling thoughts disappeared, and I only thought of my father's bitterness. The fate of the house of Puysaie lay in my hands.

"My soul is filled with devotion to the dear beings whom duty and my heart order me to love better than myself. There is no sacrifice I would not willingly make to spare my mother a trouble, yet I should like to know what is the reason which makes this sacrifice necessary.

"My father owes me this explanation. I will go to him and say:

"'My dear papa, I have resolved to be submissive. Prove to me by a single word the actual necessity for my consent, and I will give it to you at once, no matter how hard it will be for me.'

"Yes, I will tell him this, but—will I dare to risk it?

"Did he not tell me himself that I must never find out this mystery? After such a positive declaration it would be disobedient in me to look for any explanation.

"I will therefore go to my mother, and, if she sees fit not to answer my question, then, God in heaven, stand by me and give me a good idea!

"My eyes fall, as I write this, upon the note which was so mysteriously placed in my hands.

"There it lies before me, with its fine masculine hand, and I read the words:

"'Your friends watch; assist them.'

"Would that, perhaps, be his answer, O my God!"

CHAPTER X

THE WIDOW LAMOUROUX

IF SOCIETY possesses its celebrities, the lower classes possess theirs also.

The Widow Lamouroux was a well-known character in the poor quarters of the city. In more than one garret where there was neither bread nor fire the sad inmate would say, if she saw a purse which had been left on the table:

"The good lady has been here."

More than one poor girl had been saved from the brink of despair by getting employment at Madame Rozel's, and receiving a part of her wages in advance.

What Madame Rozel said was also said at the same time by the Widow Lamouroux, whose right hand she was.

Where did Madame Lamouroux come from? Who was she?

Where did she come from?

From the angels.

Where would she go?

To Paradise.

Who was she?

Providence

Those who had seen her stated that she was an old woman, but a hundred times handsomer than a young one, with big, blue eyes and a mild, quiet face.

Madame Lamouroux lived very retired.

She hardly ever left her residence, which was above Madame Rozel's store.

Madame Lamouroux had no other confidante than Madame Rozel and Joseph Rozel, her brother, and sometimes, though seldom, Monsieur Clement, the celebrated jeweller in the Boulevard des Capucins.

In the work-room behind Madame Rozel's store sat half a dozen pretty young girls, who had all been brought there by Madame Lamouroux.

As soon as Madame Rozel's back was turned, these working-girls generally conversed about their benefactor, Madame Lamouroux.

"I saw her yesterday," said one.

"And I," said another, "heard some one talking in her room as I came down the stairs. It was certainly her voice."

As soon as Madame Rozel returned the conversation would immediately cease.

Only our friend Ursula remained melancholy and pensive.

In her ear the name Joseph Rozel had so unexpectedly pronounced still echoed.

Cyprienne.

Where was she? What was she doing?

Suddenly a shout of joy was heard:

"Monsieur Joseph! Monsieur Joseph!"

The blond, brown and black heads were raised, and the rosy lips smiled.

Joseph was very popular in his sister's work-room.

In his hand he held a letter, the envelope of which was sealed with a coat of arms.

"Is my sister here?" he asked.

"She is with Madame Lamouroux," replied the girls.

"Good," said Joseph. "I shall go up."

He had not been gone long, when a rustling noise was heard on the stairs.

It was Madame Rozel who was descending.

In her hand she held the letter her brother had just given her.

"Leave your work for the present," she said, turning to Ursula; "you are wanted."

Happy Ursula! She was to see and speak with Madame Lamouroux.

Ursula tremblingly ascended the stairs, and timidly knocked at the door.

A gentle voice called out, "Come in," and Ursula entered a large room, simply yet tastefully furnished.

"Come nearer, Ursula," said the gentle voice; "come nearer, my child."

Joseph, who was still in the room, forced the embarrassed girl toward the big easy-chair from whence the voice came.

"You wish to speak to me about two of your neighbors, don't you?" asked Madame Lamouroux.

"Yes, madame," replied Ursula; "the poor people are very unhappy."

"You speak of Signor Cinella, a Punch-and-Judy performer, and a young girl who is known under the name of Pippiona—am I right?"

"Yes. Cinella himself gave her this name," replied Ursula. "Her real name is Blanche, and I never call her otherwise."

Madame Lamouroux nodded, and said:

"That is a double reason for me to interest myself for your *protegées*, for I dearly loved a person of that name. I understand the girl is very sick. I am going on a journey, but before I go I shall send Dr. Ozam to her. You can get the prescription made at the apothecary's shop that the physician will name to you. For the rest, you can rely on Madame Rozel."

"Oh, madame!" said Ursula, "how happy you will make these poor people! I thank you!"

"If you want us to remain friends never thank me."

Ursula, thinking the interview at an end, attempted to leave.

Madame Lamouroux held her back.

"One minute," she said. "Your name is Ursula, is it not?"

"Yes, madame, Ursula Durand."

"The letter you wrote me in regard to your *protegées* is well written. You must have received a good education?"

"Yes, madame; I was brought up in the Convent of B—— by the Sisters of Holy Martha."

"Did you not have a particular friend in the convent?"

Ursula glanced at Joseph.

The latter stood with his elbows on the mantel-piece, and smiled at her.

Madame Lamouroux noticed this.

"I think we understand each other," she said. "Your friend suffers; console her, and tell her that her friends watch, and that she should assist them."

At these last words Madame Rozel entered the room.

"Are you not going to the Puysaie house to-day, my dear Rozel?" asked Madame Lamouroux.

"Yes, madame."

"If that is the case, I beg you to take Ursula along. *Au revoir*, dear child."

With these words the good Madame Lamouroux clasped Ursula in her arms and kissed her on the forehead.

Never had Ursula been so happy. With a bound she descended the stairs which she had ascended with such nervous fear.

Madame Rozel, who had preceded her, was waiting downstairs.

The boxes for Cyprienne were already tied up.

One of the girls had ordered a cab.

"Are we ready?" asked Madame Rozel.

She suddenly seemed to remember that she had forgotten something.

She took up her apron, which she had laid off, and taking out a letter, put it in her bosom.

Then she and Ursula got into the hack.

The latter's heart was beating wildly—she was to see Cyprienne again!

"Dear child," said Madame Rozel to her, "I will bring you direct to Mademoiselle Cyprienne. I have to speak to Madame Postel. All you have to do is to try on some dresses and have the trimmings selected. You can do it alone, can you not?"

"I hope and believe so, madame," replied Ursula.

Meanwhile the conversation between Madame Lamouroux and Joseph continued. They were both pale, and spoke with wrinkled foreheads and trembling lips.

"I know Legigant's real name," said Joseph. "He was pointed out to me, and, although very much changed, I recognized him at once. Legigant is none other than Hercules Champion."

CHAPTER XI

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

[*From the Blue Diary*]

"I HAVE seen you again, my sweet Ursula, my dear sister! You have shed tears on this book. You have read therein the tortures of my heart, and after you turned the last page, you repeated the words of the Vicomte de la Cruz to me:

"'Your friends watch; assist them.'

"My mother no longer leaves her room. My father spent the whole forenoon with her to-day, while admittance was strictly denied any one, even to me.

"I think especially me, for they spoke about my marriage. I saw this, when I was finally allowed to see my poor mother, on her reddened eyelids.

"I spent the remaining hours of the day with her. I cast my eyes on my work, while my mother pretended to be reading.

"Fortunately, we received a visit from the Countess of Monte-Cristo.

"When the latter saw how pale I looked, she anxiously inquired after my health.

"'I do not know what's the matter with her,' replied my mother; 'I fear she does not like it here.'

"'You must provide some recreation for her,' said the Countess of Monte Cristo. 'Send her to me the day after to-morrow. I have invited a lot of other young girls. The mothers will speak with each other while the young girls dance in the park. Perhaps that will please Mademoiselle Cyprienne better than one of our ceremonial balls or receptions.'

"Mamma replied that she would let me decide, and then they spoke of other things.

"When the Countess of Monte-Cristo had gone, my mother turned to me, and said:

"'Has your father spoken to you, Cyprienne?'

"'Yes, mamma.'

"'You must be brave, my child, and obey.'

"'Ah, mamma!'

"I could not say anything more.

"My mother had arisen from her chair, and I already lay in her arms.

"'What folly!' she muttered in my ear. 'Why do you cry? You do not love any one, and the sacrifice will therefore not be so hard for you to make.'

"I did not answer.

"'O my God!" exclaimed my mother again, as she pushed me gently from her, 'am I not punished enough already?'

"My tears ceased to flow and I began to tremble.

"'You should be unhappy your whole lifetime and bear the guilt of another? No, that must not be! That would be cruel and unjust! God in heaven! Do you really want my Cyprienne, my only happiness, to be sacrificed to this Matifay? No, should I die a thousand deaths, should I—'

"She paused. After a while she continued in a broken voice:

" 'Sleep easy, my daughter, your mother will watch. I will take up the battle with your father. God will give me strength, and I swear to you that you shall not marry the man they are trying to force upon you!'

"My mother burst into tears, and threw herself upon the sofa.

"She was ghastly pale, and as stiff as a corpse.

"I regretted the trouble I had involuntarily caused.

"I begged my mother to pardon my childish fears; I solemnly assured her that my antipathy to Baron Matifay was not as invincible as I first thought, and that I would try to accustom myself to the thought of being a good wife to him.

" 'Consider it well, Cyprienne,' said my mother; 'if you are really strong enough to remain faithful to your resolve you will save us all a great deal of trouble and grief. In the contrary case, you can rest assured that I shall always be with you, and that not a hair of your head will be touched if I can prevent it.'

"When I reached the corridor, still laboring under the excitement of this interview, I met Colonel Fritz.

"He stood close to the door out of which I stepped, and recoiled as soon as he saw me.

"In spite of his coolness, he seemed to be embarrassed, bowed to me without speaking a word, and went away.

"What was he doing here?

"Had he been overhearing us?

"I think so.

"He is the enemy whom I have to fear; of that *I* am positive.

"I found in my jewel-casket a second letter.

"It is very short, but more clear than the first one. It seems to have been written by the same hand, and is signed by two initials.

"The contents are as follows:

"'We know your enemies and the nature of the danger which threatens you. Yet we wish to speak with you. We will be at the Champs Elysees to-morrow and see you there with a white rose in the hand. If you let it fall out of the coach, then we shall look upon it as a sign that you accept the purest and most complete devotion that a person can lay at the feet of an angel.

"'J. C.'

"Yes, dear Ursula, 'an angel'—my heart leaped for joy when I read the word.

"Yet I shall not go there to-morrow, or let the rose fall.

"If it would only rain.

"It is late. The sky is covered with clouds and the thunder rolls in the distance. A few drops of rain fall on the trembling branches.

"I sit at the window and dream.

"Above the top of a chestnut-tree, through the branches, I see a street corner dimly lighted by a gas-lamp. In the ring cast on the ground by the light of the lamp I see a shadow—the shadow of a man who stands motionless against a wall.

"I hurriedly drew back. The shadow, which didn't know that it was observed, stretched out its arms as if

to hold me back, and the beating of my heart seemed to tell me that I had seen the vicomte.

"I opened the window, placed myself full in the light, and gave the vicomte an imperative sign.

"He understood its meaning, bowed deeply, and strode slowly away.

"The thunder has ceased now, the rain is pouring down in torrents. Ah, if it would only rain to-morrow, too—

"Early next morning my mother sent for me and told me to quickly dress myself, as she wished to drive with me after breakfast through the Bois de Boulogne.

"I allowed Madame Postel to arrange my hair.

"This woman is really an artist in her line, and knows what becomes me better than I do myself.

" 'Mademoiselle,' she said, after she had finished her task, 'won't you look in the glass and see if it suits you?'

" 'It is beautiful, my dear Postel.'

"More I could not say. On the left side of my head the prettiest white rose you can think of was stuck into my hair.

" 'Why did you pin this white rose in my hair, Postel?' I asked.

" 'Does it not please you, mademoiselle?' she naively replied; 'it becomes you wonderfully.'

" 'I would rather have done without it.'

" 'Then I would have to arrange your hair differently,' sighed the maid.

" 'No, let us leave it as it is, my dear Postel. I think myself that a rose is very becoming.'

"This rose in my hair proves that I received the

vicomte's note, that I read it, and that I accept this proof of devotion.

"But, as I do not hold the rose in my hand, and do not let it fall as he asks, I clearly give him to understand that I only accept this single proof of devotion and no other. This thought makes me feel easy.

"The sun has come out warm and bright. The birds chirp merrily, and I myself feel like dancing about my room.

"I hear the carriage rolling in the courtyard; mamma is calling. Good-by, Ursula! I love you!"

CHAPTER XII

AURELIE

MIDDAY hour struck long ago, but in the handsome Aurelie's house the day has hardly begun. The light streams through the closed shutters and encircles the gilded edges of the rosewood furniture.

An indefinable perfume fills the atmosphere; the curtains and hangings are penetrated with it.

The room is empty, but the bed still bears the impress of the beautiful form which rested in it.

The mistress of the mansion is away. In the air which she breathed, however, in the object which she touched with her hand, on the velvet carpet her feet trod, she left behind an aroma of grace.

A murmur of voices arises and serves us as a guide.

We lift up a curtain and find ourselves in a dining-room decorated *a la Chinoise.*

The marble floor is covered with a fine mat; extraordinary birds flutter about the walls, and flowers and plants are scattered all about the room. Goldfish swim in a large aquarium, and a mandarin winks with his eyes and eats swallows' nests.

Aurelie and Nini Moustache sit opposite each other at the breakfast-table.

Nini Moustache is drinking her coffee, and a carafe of rum which stands beside her is one-quarter empty.

Aurelie sits carelessly on her bamboo chair, and observes her friend with an indescribable smile.

Attachment, irony, contempt, pride—all seemed to mingle in this smile.

"Ah!" exclaimed Nini, putting down her empty cup and placing her elbows firmly on the table, "what kind of a woman are you anyway?"

"I," replied Aurelie, quietly, "am a woman who has seen a great deal, loved a great deal, hated a great deal, suffered a great deal, caused others to suffer a great deal, and to whom consequently nothing feminine is a stranger."

"I should think," replied Nini, "you were the devil's daughter, if I did not believe at other times that you were a seraph."

"What difference does it make who I am!" said Aurelie, quickly. "I showed you my power, and that is all I intend to do for the present. Recently you refused to tell me your family name. I just told you what it was. You are Celine Durand. You told me your sister was educated in a convent in the country, and that is true too. In what province, in what city is this convent? Did I not tell you at once the Convent of Holy Martha, in B——?"

Aurelie paused for a moment, and then continued:

"Shall I tell you also the name of the dressmaker for whom your sister works? She is called Madame Rozel, and lives in the Rue Vivienne. The people with whom your sister lives are Monsieur and Madame Gosse, and live in the Rue Rambuteau. I could tell you things about each of these persons, Ursula not excepted, which are

unknown to you. For the present I do not care to make any revelations. I only wish to impress you with a sense of my power. And how much time did I take to find Ursula in this ant-hill called Paris, and learn everything about her, just as well, and perhaps better, than you?—hardly a few hours. It is the same thing with reference to Colonel Fritz and Legigant; the latter of whom, by the way, is not Legigant, but bears a different name, at the mere mention of which he would fall at your feet and beg you for mercy."

"Ah! What name is that?" asked Nini Moustache.

"I will not tell you," replied Aurelie dryly. "In the first place I cannot do it, because this name is a double sword, which you would not know how to handle; and secondly, because I demand of those who come to me one thing—confidence. Have confidence in me and I will lift the burden from your heart as easily as I raise this cup in air. I will secure your sister against any revenge or temptation; I will rescue Louis Jacquemin from the brink of despair, and make you yourself better and nobler than you are. Only one thing I cannot do; recall your father to life again. Yet I am convinced that in your own heart you will look upon his pardon as heavenly dew."

"And," said Nini, still distrustful, "what do you ask in return?"

"Nothing—nothing but belief, for only belief makes blessed."

"Then," said Nini, "I cannot understand, and cannot believe."

Aurelie shrugged her shoulders.

"Tell me at least," said Nini Moustache again, "what is your interest in all this?"

"What is my interest? Oh you wicked soul, as you yourself said a short while ago, if you followed the plan Legigant proposed to you, if you sold Ursula and delivered her over to vice—what keeps you back, why do you hesitate, why do you cry for help, why are you so willing to sacrifice everything?"

"Ursula is my sister," replied Nini, indignantly.

"Then," exclaimed Aurelie as she proudly arose, "then I stand far above you, for I look upon all women as my sisters."

A ray of sunlight streaming through the window shed a halo of glory over Aurelie's blond hair.

Out of her eyes unspeakable tenderness shone.

With a moving gesture she opened her arms as if she wished to press all the women on the earth to her bosom—the beggar as well as the courtesan, the deserted wife as well as the adulterous one, the unfortunate as well as the guilty.

She looked like a living statue of rescue and pardon.

Nini looked tenderly at her.

The vision disappeared.

The sun hid behind a cloud, and the enthusiasm gave place to a deep, unconquerable sadness.

"Listen!" said Aurelie. "You told me your history recently, and your recollections caused you great grief. If I tell you now that all that was nothing, that you are only a child when it comes to griefs and tortures borne; if I tell you that there is a woman whose name alone fills all those who hear it pronounced with terror; that everything was taken from this woman, and everything killed—her husband, her lover, her child; that there is not a fibre of her heart which has not undergone martyrdom, and that

there is not a drop of gall which she was not forced to drink—if I tell you that this woman arose from the dead like Lazarus, that a miracle restored everything which was at all possible to her, at one blow, and that a gentle voice whispered to her: 'Go, my daughter, travel through the world, withhold the trials you have undergone from your sisters. Your rescue was not a selfish one, whose treasure you avariciously keep for yourself alone; share the fruits of the same with all souls who want the good, raise up those who are dragged down, console the grieved, protect the unhappy, forgive the guilty.' And if I tell you now, Celine, that I who speak to you am this woman, will you then, my sister, draw back your mouth from the beaker of life I hold to your lips? You have implored me for consolation. It comes in my person. Will you repulse it? Will you still doubt, poor soul, while you have only to believe to be rescued?"

Nini Moustache was conquered; Aurelie's enthusiasm gradually took possession of her. She felt a peculiar shudder run down her back, and thought to herself:

"Yes, yes, this Aurelie is more than a woman!"

When Aurelie asked her for an explanation, she replied with a certain amount of religious reverence:

"You order; your servant obeys."

"My servant!" exclaimed Aurelie, with a faint laugh. "No, my sister! I am just such a wicked, such a weak creature like you, my poor Celine, and if God took his hand from me you would see me cry and moan, just the way you did recently."

Aurelie rang a bell, and immediately afterward the woolly head of a little negro appeared in the doorway.

"Zino, have the horses harnessed," said Aurelie;

"excuse me for a moment, Nini. My hair is dressed, as you see, and I only have to put a dress on."

So saying, she went to her boudoir, while Nini, still laboring under the excitement of what she had seen and heard, sat still.

At the end of a few minutes Aurelie, all dressed up, re-entered the room.

She had the same sarcastic smile, the proud strut and the keen glance usual to her.

Nini Moustache did not recognize her again as the same person who had spoken so enthusiastically to her but a short time before. She thought she had been dreaming.

It was not long before Zino appeared in the doorway again and made a noise like the cracking of a whip.

"He is dumb, isn't he?" asked Nini in surprise.

"Yes," replied Aurelie, "he cannot tattle."

An elegant open barouche stood in the courtyard.

The two ladies got in.

"To the Bois!" said Aurelie.

The barouche drawn by the two thoroughbreds started off in the direction of the Champs Elysees.

"Now," began Aurelia, "now I shall tell you what you have to do, little one."

"I am listening," replied Nini, simply.

"First of all," continued Aurelie, "what is the nature of the work you have done for Legigant and what does he still demand of you? I can hardly think that he expects for a moment to control the Count of Puysaie through your influence and your advice."

Nini seemed to be embarrassed for an answer, and Aurelie continued:

"You have only acted as a destroying instrument, for

a man might dishonor himself, sacrifice wife and child for a creature of our class, but he will never ask her for advice. A man ruins himself for his friend, but seeks advice from his wife. You have only been made acquainted with the Count of Puysaie for the purpose of ruining him. Legigant thought it would be a double advantage for him to have this done by you. In the first place, he had an indirect interest in it, because you would divide the booty with him, and, on the other hand, your clothes, your coach, your horses—in short everything with the exception of your jewels, mainly bought on credit —were resold by Legigant's tools—"

"How do you know this?" interrupted Nini Moustache.

"That doesn't interest you," replied Aurelie; "a second interest, about which I am still in doubt, but which I divine, lies in Legigant's getting the Count de Puysaie in a hole, and leaving him the choice between total ruin or the marriage of his daughter with Baron Matifay."

Aurelie made a short pause, and then continued:

"Let us suppose, for instance, that this marriage takes place. Then Legigant has no need for your services any more; but do you think that he will let you have peace? Through your sister he has you in his power. Why does Legigant spare you, since the work he gave you to do is finished? The reason for this is, that though you are of no use to Legigant any more, you are dangerous. You would not have sufficient influence over the Count de Puysaie to force him to marry off his daughter, if other reasons did not induce him; nevertheless you possess sufficient influence to prevent the count from going any further. It is not you who will speak, but his own con-

science. I am convinced that he is searching for some ground to break the relation, which has bothered him a long time already, and which he is afraid to acknowledge. Give him this ground, and you shall see how eagerly he will take advantage of it."

After another short pause, Aurelie continued:

"If I were in your place, I would do as follows: I would ask the count to come to me. I would tell him I heard the news that his daughter was going to marry Baron Matifay. It was publicly said that I brought about this match, and I did not care to have such an accusation rest on my shoulders. 'It is said,' I would say, 'that you sacrifice your daughter for your lady friend, but your lady friend will sacrifice herself for your daughter. Take back all the presents you have ever made me, I do not care to have anything further to do with them.' Should he refuse to do this—and he will of necessity refuse to do so—then persist in your demand nevertheless. Should he look upon the whole thing in the light of a joke, quietly listen to him, let him go away, and forbid him to enter your house again. Before a week has passed he will submit, and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that, for the first time in your life, you have done a good action. With regard to Legigant you can remain easy. I give you my word that not a hair of Ursula's head will be touched. Every project made against her will reach my knowledge, and be foiled."

Aurelie's coach reached the Place de la Concorde at this moment.

A stream of carriages and riders moved along the Avenue de l'Etoile.

The ladies, carelessly reclining on the velvet cushions,

returned the deep salutations of the cavaliers by a graceful wave of the hand.

Other gentlemen hurried close to the carriages and bent over toward them so as to be able to converse with the beautiful occupants.

Celebrities of the aristocracy, finance and demi-monde —all were there, and they could be easily recognized by the good taste, or awkward display, or by the eccentric character of their coaches.

On both sides of the road, under the trees, the crowd gathered at the edge of the curbstone saw the favorites of fortune pass by.

The great mass of the people see the brilliancy of the silks and the sparkle of the diamonds; the troubles which this livery of wealth conceal they know nothing of.

What griefs can be in store, they think, for people who eat the finest viands out of the finest porcelain, who live in gilded rooms, and sleep in silk beds with velvet curtains?

Grief can only exist for those who have no bread and no home, or those who earn them by the sweat of their brows.

Happy the rich!

This minister has arisen at four o'clock in the morning. He is working industriously, while masons and carpenters are still asleep; he is still awake when they have long since been to bed.

The thought of the burden which rests on him never leaves him; it accompanies him even in the short pauses consecrated to rest.

The balls, the parties, the plays, the magnificent banquets for which he is envied, are perhaps his greatest

martyrdom; for after reading despatches and letters for six successive hours, he must keep his eyes exposed to the blinding glare of brilliantly illuminated parlors.

Ah! how often would he not rather be the modest father of a family, who sits at the cosey hearth and rocks his child upon his knee.

But, no; happy the rich!

The carriages rolled by with liveried lackeys in the front and back; the proud horses foamed in their bits, and stamped their hoofs.

The clerks opened their eyes wide to see the duchesses roll past, young girls sighed at the sight of the costly stuffs, and philosophers grumbled in their hearts.

Happy, happy the rich!

A coach, escorted on either side by a horseman, rides past. A count's crown ornaments the coach doors.

Two ladies, one of them a young girl of wonderful beauty, sat in the carriage, spoke softly to each other, and smiled.

They were the Countess de Puysaie and Cyprienne.

The two horsemen were Count de Puysaie and Colonel Fritz.

The crowd, with mingled envy and wonder, saw the elegant turn-out disappear, and a neat little brunette, in a simple calico dress, sighed:

"Ah, how happy the rich people are!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE ROMANCE OF A ROSE

WE NEED hardly state that, at the time this story opens, the Bois de Boulogne was not what it is to-day. At that time there were neither lakes nor waterfalls. Nothing was seen but short, thin grass and decayed oak-trees.

The coquettish woods, in which we now admire the beauties of English gardening, at that time were poverty-stricken, shorn and wild. Yet this wildness and baldness was not at all disagreeable.

The decayed oaks of the Bois de Boulogne bore a comparison to the fertile shades of Saint-Cloud and Mendon, which was not without a certain degree of piquancy.

The suburbs of Paris are really more or less natural parks, the most natural of them all being the Bois de Boulogne.

As bare as it was, the neighborhood of the rich city quarters had already made it the favorite meeting-place and promenade of fine society.

As soon as Count Loredan de Puysaie and Colonel Fritz had passed the Porte Maillat, they gave their horses to a lackey, and went and seated themselves opposite the countess and her daughter.

Perhaps they thought they could observe the two ladies better in this way.

Loredan especially did not take his eyes off of them. Cyprienne's marriage was the only remedy left him to escape complete ruin.

He began to distrust himself, and felt weak enough to succumb to a union between his wife and his daughter. If they remained separated, he felt strong enough to resist; on the other hand, if they united it would not be difficult to conquer his vacillating will.

He must prevent such a union. *Divide et impera* is a maxim which has proved true ever since there have been more than two persons on the earth.

The carriages rolled along the road, crossed each other, and performed the most wonderful figures, like dancers in an enormous quadrille.

Suddenly Cyprienne uttered a low moan, laid her hand on her mother's arm, and exclaimed:

"There comes the Countess of Monte-Cristo!"

But when the carriage she pointed out came nearer she blushed, for she saw that she was mistaken.

This eccentric coach, this negro groom in gaudy clothes, could not belong to the Countess of Monte-Cristo.

Everything denoted elegance, but that peculiar kind of elegance which borders on bad taste.

How could Cyprienne for a single moment imagine that this bold, forward woman, with the loud laugh and striking costume, was the Countess of Monte-Cristo?

Yet she could not help muttering:

"How closely she resembles her!"

Colonel Fritz's lips broke into a malicious smile.

"There goes the *casta diva*, Aurelie," he said; "the Vicomte de la Cruz cannot be far off, then."

The words struck Cyprienne clear to the heart. What was there between the vicomte and this woman?

No doubt what the colonel said was a malicious lie. What interest could he have, however, in running down the vicomte in Cyprienne's hearing, as he could not have any knowledge of the secret correspondence between them?

A feeling she had never known took possession of her heart.

Was it jealousy?

No, certainly not. Cyprienne de Puysaie could not be jealous of a creature like Aurelie!

The feeling she felt was rather one of indignation and sorrow.

She did not wish to place any belief in the colonel's words; the heart, however, loves to torture itself, and in spite of all her efforts she believed.

What would she not have given if the vicomte were not in the Bois, for now she did not know whether he would be there on her account or on Aurelie's.

This last refuge of weak souls, which continually fly from facts, was soon to be taken from her.

The vicomte, seated on an Arabian steed, came riding up.

Never had Cyprienne seen him look so handsome, so calm, and so energetic. His hand carelessly held the reins.

"There! Did I not say so?" said the colonel; "the siren follows the blinded one on foot."

"*Trahit sua quemque voluptas*," added the count, laughing, to show that he had not forgotten the Latin he had learned of the Jesuits.

He immediately followed it with a free translation:

"Every bug has its thread."

Cyprienne felt faint.

Aurelie's relations to the vicomte were thus known to every one; she was the only one who knew nothing of them.

Had the vicomte lied? Were not silence and lying the same thing in such a case?

This hero—this statue which she had taken for a costly work of art—was nothing else then but a common plaster cast, which one word of the colonel's smashed to pieces like the blow of a hammer?

Cyprienne, who but the day before had maintained that she would only accept the vicomte's protection but not his love, thought now that the offer of his protection without that of his love was an insult.

Then she became indignant again at what she had just heard—what she had herself seen.

"It is impossible!" she said to herself. "The colonel is mistaken. My father is mistaken. Every one is mistaken. I am the only one who knows the vicomte."

At this moment the vicomte again met the count's carriage; this time at the side where Cyprienne sat.

She hurriedly raised her hand to her hair.

It was perhaps the tenth time Cyprienne had made this gesture.

"What is the matter, Cyprienne?" said the countess. "Are you sick?"

"Ah, no, not at all, mamma," replied Cyprienne, blushing; "it is only this rose—it hurts me."

"Wait, my child!" said the countess.

With these words she bent over her daughter's fore-

head and began to take the rose out of the hair without disarranging it.

"It is not necessary, mamma, it is not necessary!" protested Cyprienne, energetically.

"Now it's all right," said her mother, as she took the rose out. But at the last energetic movement Cyprienne made to prevent her mother from getting the rose, the latter let it fall.

Cyprienne bent down quickly to grasp the flower. It was too late, however, and when the vicomte turned around, he saw the rose lie on the ground, and Cyprienne's white hand outstretched as if the flower had just fallen from it.

As soon as the count's carriage had turned the corner, the vicomte sprang from his horse and picked up the flower.

He then leaped into the saddle again and galloped away. Intoxicated with joy, he pressed the flower to his bosom, as if afraid some one might try to take it away from him.

He rode on, indifferent to where he was going. His glance flew above the hills and valleys, like the glance of a conqueror. His bosom swelled with enthusiasm, and he felt happy.

Cyprienne loved him! What a talisman! How strong he felt in this thought!

In the morning he had still doubted whether his projects would be crowned with success. He felt weak against so many enemies. The struggle which he led as an ally of the Countess of Monte-Cristo had tired out his will power and his courage; now, however, a new ally descended from heaven—love!

Love!

It was the first time that this paradise pigeon cooed in his ears.

Gradually the blood in his veins flowed more calmly, and the wild beating of his heart ceased.

He looked at the objects which surrounded him, and noticed that he had gone quite a distance from Paris.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. He had not a minute to lose.

He turned his horse around in the direction of the city, and set off at a sharp trot.

One hour later the vicomte got out of the saddle in the courtyard of his hotel, threw the reins to the stable-boy, and hurried upstairs to his room.

He stayed here just long enough to change his clothes, and write two lines, which he placed in a satin envelope.

He then left the house again, got into the first hack he met, and had himself driven to the Rue de Varennes.

The carriage turned into the narrow street which adjoined the garden of the Puysaie mansion.

The hack stopped, and a little door immediately opened, out of which Madame Postel stepped.

"Get in, Madame Jacquemin!" said the vicomte, and, turning to the coachman, added: "Boulevard des Invalides—slowly."

The maid, embarrassed at the honor paid her by the vicomte, did not venture to seat herself. He gently took her hand, and forced her to a seat.

"We can talk better that way," he continued. "I have good news to tell you about Louis. He has a good place now with Clement, the jeweler. He was warmly recommended, and if he commits a mistake now and then, he

will be excused, until he is fully responsible again. Your poor son is now a big child. We have apprenticed him so that he learns courage and uprightness."

Madame Jacquemin seized the vicomte's hand and kissed it.

"You know," he said, as he drew back his hand, "that you owe thanks to Madame Lamouroux and the Countess of Monte-Cristo, and not to me. You went to them, they promised to rescue your son—upon the one condition that you assist them in the good work they have in hand."

"Yes," replied Madame Jacquemin, "if these ladies are Providence, then, Monsieur le Vicomte, you are their ambassador."

"Have you anything new to tell me?" asked the vicomte, impatiently.

"No, nothing," replied Madame Jacquemin; "the young lady was closeted with her mamma yesterday. They wept a great deal. Later, Mademoiselle Cyprienne locked herself up the whole evening and wrote—ah, I had almost forgotten it; she asked me to go to Madame Rozel and fetch the working-girl who was once before at the house. I think her name is Ursula."

"Ursula," he murmured, "will have to speak to Madame Lamouroux once more. She will tell no more."

He then asked aloud:

"Is that all?"

"Yes," said Madame Jacquemin; "the countess and the young lady have gone to the Bois. I pinned a white rose in the latter's hair as you ordered. At first she wanted me to take it away, then she considered the matter, and ordered me to leave it."

"Here," said the vicomte, "is a note which you will lay in the usual place."

"Good!" replied Madame Jacquemin, simply.

The glances of the two persons did not sink to the ground while one of them gave the note and the other took it.

Madame Jacquemin would not have consented to do anything improper. She believed in the vicomte just as one believes in God, and obeyed his orders without distrust or second thoughts.

Madame Jacquemin and the vicomte got out of the coach.

He paid the coachman and went away, while she returned to the Rue de Varennes, in the direction of the boulevards.

He was now pensive. The confidence he felt a while ago began to weaken. Doubt filled his mind.

But a short while before he had said to himself:

"She loves me!"

Now he asked himself:

"Will she love me? If she knows me better, if I show myself to her in my right light and tell her who I really am—will she still love me?"

He was silent a short time and then continued:

"This rose proves nothing. What can a rose prove anyway? The restlessness of her heart, that's all. Cyprienne feels herself deserted by those whose duty it is to defend her at the risk of their lives and their honor, and she clutches the first protection which comes in her way like a drowning man does a straw. Fear is the reason, not love. What have I done, anyway, to deserve her love? Is she not surrounded by thousands who are handsomer, more

intelligent, and worthier than I? No, it was folly in me to believe that she loves me. She cannot love me, and does not love me."

The vicomte became gloomy, but after a while he shook off his gloom and said:

"Well, no matter! Her confidence shall not be abused. Let her love me or not, I shall devote my life to her, and feel happy if she takes it. No, I will be stronger, and if I am conquered in this struggle, I shall not even say to her: 'It is you for whom I die!' "

Cyprienne in the meanwhile had returned home from her drive.

As if impelled by a dim suspicion, she quickly hurried to the jewel casket.

She found a note in it, with the words:

"Thanks for the joy your confidence gives me. You have been invited to the Countess of Monte-Cristo's house to-morrow. Come there! J. DE LA C."

CHAPTER XIV

THE PAVEMENT OF HELL

NINI MOUSTACHE had returned to the house in the Barriere Pigalle.

Aurelie had stepped out of the carriage at the corner of the Chausee d'Antin, and let Nini ride home alone. As soon as the latter had got rid of her, she became thoughtful.

The energetic words of her friend had convinced her. She had resolved to follow her advice at once, and even to go beyond it. Natures of this kind always go to extremes.

Nini wished to leap over the black abyss, which separated her from what Aurelie had pictured to her as a second Canaan, at one bound.

She wished to become Celine again, and be Nini Moustache no longer.

At first it seemed an easy task.

The principal thing was to break with the past.

For her and through her the Count of Puysaie had become ruined. If it were impossible for her to restore the whole fortune he had wasted in a few years, she could at least give him back the presents still in her possession.

She would have to return them quickly, so that Legigant could not hinder it.

Hardly had she arrived home than she took banknotes, coupons, bonds and shares—in short, everything she owed to the count's generosity—placed them in a large envelope and addressed it to the Count of Puysaie.

She then took out her jewels.

These she divided into two parts.

One part, the least valuable, came from different persons.

These Nini kept to get the first sums of money necessary for her new mode of life.

The other, the most valuable part, came from the count, and these she had to return.

There were diamonds, rubies, sapphires, pearls and bracelets.

Nini Moustache put them on for the last time, let the stones sparkle in the candle-light, and locked them with a heavy sigh in the box.

There were only two or three jewellers in Paris who could buy the contents of the jewel box.

Nini immediately wrote to Monsieur Clement, Boulevard des Capucins, and punctually next morning he showed up at the house.

This business man, or rather artist, whose name has occurred several times in the course of this story, was a man about thirty years old.

Paris is the city of quick successes. Three or four years were sufficient to give this man a reputation.

Clement was a very handsome man, whom the artistic costume then in vogue fitted admirably.

He was neither vain nor proud. A cheerful smile continually played about his lips, and his eyes shot forth resolute glances.

He carefully examined the contents of the casket, and finally said he would give one hundred and fifty thousand francs for the same.

This was about what their original cost was.

Nini Moustache was a little surprised at being offered so much. She declared herself satisfied with the price, and Clement bowed, and said he would bring the money later on in the day.

He had already gone to the door, but turned around, and said: "My question is perhaps indiscreet, but is it your intention to sell the house, too?"

Nini nodded.

"Your house, with everything in it?" asked Clement. "We might be able to fix upon a price for the horses and carriages. The name of the buyer is perhaps known to you. It is one of my best customers, the Vicomte de la Cruz; and I know he is looking for just such an opportunity, without being able to find one."

"Well, then, it is just the thing," replied Nini Moustache; "I am about to go on a long journey, and this arrangement would just suit me."

"In that case, I will send the vicomte to you as soon as I see him."

Very probably Clement knew where to find his rich customer, for before the expiration of an hour the latter knocked at the gate of the house.

He examined everything in the style of aristocratic gentlemen; that is to say, merely glanced over it.

The price was fixed at two hundred and fifty thousand francs.

The bill of sale was signed at the lawyer's, the Vicomte de la Cruz signing for the Widow Lamouroux.

That same night, Nini Moustache came into possession of bonds to the value of four hundred thousand francs.

She shoved them into the envelope along with the others.

The house was to be given up the following evening to the new proprietor, and Nini resolved to have the envelope given to the Count of Puysaie the very day of her departure, so that no trace of her could be found.

She had given orders not to let in visitors. Legigant, however, possessed the golden key which opens all locks, and the next morning he was in Nini's room, just as she was packing the last trunk.

Legigant seemed to be between forty and fifty years old.

He was big, broad-shouldered and strong.

His face was not without a certain coarse regularity, in consequence of which he had formerly passed as a handsome man.

A long golden chain hung about the folds of his colored vest, which seemed to have been made out of an old shawl.

A blue frockcoat, with gold buttons, and nankin trousers, completed his costume.

Legigant, in spite of the wicked look of his face, was called a "good fellow" by all his companions.

The fact was, this shrewd schemer possessed the first qualification of a "good fellow"—a well filled purse.

It is self-understood that he only gave out money at good interest, for if his numerous debtors did not pay back in cash they paid anyhow.

Can any one refuse to oblige a person to whom one owes one's rescue from a money matter?

In consequence of this, Legigant had formed little by little a secret service of spies.

If a person knows everything, he is strong; and Legigant knew everything, from a farce in the boudoir to a bloody drama in a tavern.

This was the man whom Nina Moustache was to oppose.

He smiled.

Nini saw from this smile that the struggle would be a hard one, and was on her guard.

"Ah!" said Legigant, pretending to have just observed the trunks on the floor, "we are going travelling, it seems?"

"Yes," replied Nini, resolutely.

Legigant seated himself on one of the trunks and pressed the ivory head of his cane to his mouth.

"And you do not tell me anything about it?" he said, after a pause. "That is not right; think of everything I have done for you!"

Nini looked at him as if about to reply, but merely shrugged her shoulders.

"And when are you coming back?" continued Legigant, in an indifferent tone.

"I don't know," replied Nini Moustache, dryly.

She hung her eyes down, for she felt that the struggle would begin.

Legigant wrinkled his bushy eyebrows.

His eyes rolled here and there, and finally fell on the envelope addressed to the Count de Puysaie.

"What's that?" he asked as he arose.

Nini Moustache placed herself between him and the envelope.

"That doesn't concern you!" she exclaimed, "you cannot see it."

"Come, come," said Legigant, in a rough voice and trembling with rage, "no childishness, please."

He immediately perceived by the behavior of his slave, who was yesterday so submissive and to-day so bold, that he had taken the wrong road; he therefore added, in a gentle voice:

"Let us remain good friends; it will be best for all of us."

"I really do not know why I should not tell you," said Nini; "it is only a question of a reparation I shall make to Count de Puysaie."

"A reparation!" repeated Legigant ironically; "upon my word of honor, this is really emotional. Florestan spoiled you, little one; he took you too often to the play. Believe me, a comedy is more suitable for a smart girl. Yet, that is your own affair. The money is yours, for it was given to you, and you can make whatever use of it you think best."

Nini was surprised at such an easy triumph, and felt more distrustful than ever.

"How much," asked Legigant, "is in there?"

"Four hundred thousand francs!"

Legigant smiled contemptuously.

"Four hundred thousand francs! A bagatelle which will not save the count, but for you a fortune."

He went close to Nini and seized her hands.

"Let us understand each other," he went on. "I needed the ruin of the Count de Puysaie. That ruin

has been accomplished. Don't you think that if these four hundred thousand francs would save the count, I would very soon find a means of preventing you from giving them to him? You can make this reparation, though; it does not disturb any of my plans. If you wish I will escort you to the door of his house, while you carry out this beautiful example of self-sacrifice. I only ask you to do one thing—reflect!"

All this was said in a fatherly way.

Nini did not know whether she should trust her ears.

"I just came," continued Legigant in the same tone, "to tell you I do not need your aid any longer. I have noticed for some time already that you only give me your assistance under compulsion. You would therefore be a bad instrument in the future for me, and I would much rather do without you. If people know each other as well as we do, they are always able to tell what reliance can be placed on one another. One fine day other thoughts arise, and I wish to give you a proof to-day of the interest I take in you, by arranging your future as well as possible."

Legigant paused to take breath, and then continued:

"I was going to advise you to sell this house, your jewels, your carriages, in a word, everything. This has already been done. Good! It has produced four hundred thousand francs. This sum, at five per cent, gives an income of twenty thousand francs, with which you can live in comfortable circumstances, even in Paris. I have brought you the key of the furnished house in the Marais I hired for you under the name of Madame Morel."

Legigant laid the key on the table, and continued:

"Of course a person must think of everything, and I said to myself, 'If this imaginary Monsieur Morel dies, if the married cousin becomes a widow, she could inherit in Touraine or Berry, far from Paris, a small villa with an orchard and chickens. Who could hinder her, I ask, from moving there, where no one knows her, and where her twenty thousand francs' income would make her appear rich? The dear Ursula could be with her there, and they could both lead a life of tenderness and charity. That is what I thought, my treasure. You think otherwise. Do as you please about it. Give the extravagant count the money back again; rest yourself on a straw bed; let your sister be exposed to temptations: but do not come to me to complain when you get old and weary, with the ragpicker's basket over your back, and see your sister in silks and velvets roll past you in her carriage."

With these last terrible words, Legigant withdrew.

Nini Moustache was crushed.

She looked fixedly at the envelope, and from out of the bonds the dream of the tempter seemed to arise—the house with the orchard and chickens and Ursula's love.

Legigant was gone. On the table lay the key to the house in the Marais.

On the ring of the key the address was fastened.

Nini Moustache broke the seal of the envelope addressed to the count, tore it in a thousand pieces, pressed the bonds to her bosom, covered her face in her shawl, took the key in her hand, and sneaked out of her own house like a thief.

CHAPTER XV

THE HEAVENS OPEN

[*From the Blue Diary*]

"I LET the rose fall, dear Ursula, or, rather, I do not know how the rose fell of itself.

"At first I was angry at this accident, which, in spite of myself, forced me to a step I had no intention of taking.

"Now I am thankful for it. For you see I would have dropped it anyway.

"The Vicomte Don Jose de la Cruz is neither a vicomte nor is his name De la Cruz.

"Where does he come from? I do not know.

"Where does he go? I know just as little.

"What I do know, what I suspect, what the voice of my conscience tells me, is that never has a better, a more noble heart beat in a human breast.

"He is the savior I expected, whom I bless and whom I love.

"When I returned home from my drive, I found the answer to my rose.

"It was a brief note wherein I was thanked for my confidence, and asked to go to the ball of the Countess of Monte-Cristo the following day.

"I was unhappy! I was jealous!

"For a whole hour I doubted him. I listened without replying to the malicious remarks about him which were made in my presence.

"Ah, how unhappy I was! Later on I still doubted, and the reason I went to the Countess of Monte-Cristo's house was to make the vicomte justify himself in my eyes.

"The party at the Countess of Monte-Cristo's was a simple garden party.

"There were about fifty aristocratic young ladies, mainly pupils of the Sacred Heart Convent, present.

"Nothing could be seen but white dresses, purple and blue ribbons.

" 'Mademoiselle Cyprienne,' said the Countess of Monte-Cristo, with her kindly smile, 'does not seem to amuse herself here. We are too old for her, and she is too sensible for the little girls there.'

"I attempted to protest.

"She stretched out her hand toward a picture-book I had in mine.

" 'The painted flowers are very pretty, but without life or perfume. You love flowers, Mademoiselle Cyprienne, do you not?'

" 'Oh, very much, madame.'

" 'Then allow me to give you a companion.'

"She called a little blond girl to her.

" 'Cili,' she said to the little one, 'will you accompany Mademoiselle Cyprienne to the conservatory?'

" 'Yes, with pleasure,' said the child, directing her large eyes upon me, and holding out its chubby little hand to me.

"'Come, then,' she added.

"At this moment I turned around to ask my mother's consent, and was surprised to see her eyes filled with tears.

"She gently nodded to me, and I followed Cili.

"I accidentally turned around and saw my mother let her embroidery fall and stealthily seize the Countess of Monte-Cristo's hand and kiss it.

"On the way I observed my pretty guide.

"She was as quick as a bird and as delicate as a lily. The long curls fell below her shoulders, and from time to time she shook them with a merry laugh.

"We had reached the door of the hothouse.

"'Your mother must love you dearly, my little Cili,' I said.

"The little one's face became sad.

"'I do not know, although I have been told it is so,' she replied. 'I do not think so, for if my mother loved me she would sometimes visit me. I would not like to have any other mamma than Mamma Helene.'

"'Mamma Helene? Who is that?'

"'Mamma Helene? Why, that is the Countess of Monte-Cristo!'

"The poor child! It reminded me of my own desertion in the convent of B——.

"'Then you only love Mamma Helene?' I asked her again.

"'Oh, no,' replied Cili, 'I love other people too. I love, for instance, my uncle Jose and Rosa, and you too, because mamma told me to, though it wasn't necessary.'

"'Then you will not refuse me a kiss?'

"'With the greatest pleasure,' she exclaimed.

"She sprang at me with childish enthusiasm, seized my head between her little hands, and kissed and pressed me almost to suffocation.

"She then grasped a stick and ran like mad back to the terrace.

"I remained standing and watched her.

" 'Another riddle!' I said to myself; 'this one, though, is at least not a threatening one. It is one more being I can love.'

"When the little one had turned around the corner of a lane, I entered my paradise.

"Flowers, everywhere flowers! Grapes red as corals and blue as the sky.

"I wandered about these heavenly surroundings, as if in a dream.

"The vicomte arose from a bench on which he was sitting and greeted me timidly.

"I am positive that he would have gone away if I had merely hinted at it.

"I offered him my hand.

" 'You wished to see me; here I am,' I said.

"He grasped the tips of my fingers, but since he dared not press them to his lips, he let my hand fall.

" 'I thank you,' he said.

"He could not speak any more, but his eyes spoke for him.

" 'The step I take,' I said, 'proves that I am convinced of the sincerity of your devotion, and that I accept it. Yet I must say that the mystery which surrounds you inspires me with fear.'

"I paused here, and felt that I blushed.

" 'I am bound,' the vicomte simply said; 'everything

which concerns me is free to you; but my secret does not belong to me alone.'

"'Yes,' I said, 'I know you have many secrets, among others one in a satin dress, which paraded in the Bois de Boulogne yesterday.'

"The vicomte at first looked at me in surprise, then a genial smile hovered about his lips.

"'And that makes you uneasy?' he cried. 'A woman whom neither I nor any one else can love—a dead heart?'

"A frown settled over his brow, and he added, in a grave voice:

"'Mademoiselle de Puysaie, I offered you my services, and you had the kindness to accept them. These services are paid for, and with a price I hardly dared to hope for. We are quits. I know, and you ought to know it, that I cannot hope for any greater reward than the permission to serve you. The insect which hides in the grass is permitted to gaze at the stars in heaven and to enjoy their splendor. It would be folly, though, for it to spread its wings and exclaim: "I will fly higher than the eagle. I will raise myself to the stars." And if accidentally a charitable ray of starlight falls on the poor little thing, would it not be a duty to say to the star: "Star, you are mistaken; I am not the eagle. I am only a worm."'

"He paused a few seconds, then continued:

"'That is what I wished to say to you, Mademoiselle de Puysaie. A secret which it is not in my power to reveal, because it is not entirely my own, has given me artificial wealth, and a name which does not belong to me. You think me a nobleman; I am the deserted son of a peasant. You think me rich, yet the coat on my body is not my own. You think me influential, yet my influence

is received from a person whose servant and tool I am. The protection for which you thank me is a part of the mission intrusted to me. Therefore accept this protection without thinking that you owe me more for it than to a lackey who, when you leave the ballroom, hands you your wraps. I do not in reality do more than such a person. Just as he obeys orders I obey them, and think myself happy that I am commissioned to do something which I would have elected to do of my own freewill.'

"I looked observantly at him, and when he paused I said:

" 'You would have elected to do this of your own freewill? You want to give me everything and receive nothing in return?—nothing—not even the thanks of the poor heart? That isn't humility, but pride. Why do you try to belittle your services in my eyes? No, Don Jose, I have confidence in you and demand a still greater of you. You have said to me: "Trust in me and you will be rescued." And I came, offered you my hand, and replied to you: "I believe! Save me!" But I positively declare to you that I do not wish to be saved by any one else but you. The protection you offer me does not humiliate me. On the contrary, it raises me in my own estimation, because I know and divine that I do not owe it to pity alone. I lean upon your arm with the utmost confidence. The unknown being, though, who orders you as you say, inspires me with fear, and I do not wish anything from him, while I will take everything from you.'

"The vicomte was very pale. The perspiration stood in heavy drops on his forehead, and his hands twitched nervously.

" 'Ah, Cyprienne,' he cried, 'you do not know with

what rapture your words would fill my heart if I had the liberty to understand you. But, no; that cannot be. An impassable abyss separates us—my birth and my fortune. The joy to protect you is the only one which remains to me. As soon as my work is finished, and your destiny assured, the Vicomte de la Cruz will cease to exist. I will throw off my borrowed name and borrowed clothes. I will go, and take along as an eternal treasure of happiness the knowledge that I have been of use to you. And you too will then, if you do not know under what sky I live, who I am or what I do, retain the recollection of the Vicomte de la Cruz in your heart. That is, next to the joy of knowing that you are happy, the only reward he desires.'

"Tears came into my eyes. Tears of sorrow.

"He seized my hand and continued in a gentler voice:

" 'You are handsome, you are an aristocrat, you are rich, Cyprienne. Your unknown friends, whose modest tool I am, are influential, and I do not doubt that with your help they will succeed in dissuading your father from carrying out his present intentions. Treasure this threefold gift of beauty, birth, and fortune. Sooner or later you will find a man handsome, noble, and rich like you, and worthy of you, and you will be as happy as you deserve to be. As for me, I shall then be far from here; yet you will remember me as a brother, a friend who loves you—whose lot it is though to live alone!'

" 'Yes!' I exclaimed, 'you are cruel if you think I can ever be happy if I know you to be solitary and perhaps unhappy. My wealth is as repulsive to me as my high rank!'

"He sorrowfully shook his head and replied:

"'I will not be unhappy. The road I am going is a rough one, the trials and fatigues of which will leave me no time to grieve. No, Cyprienne, the recollection of vanished happiness is only a torture to the weak and the wicked. That of our meeting will be a new strength for me in the present and a new hope in the future. From a distance I shall have my eyes on you, you will show me the way, and I will feel strengthened and consoled.'

"This, my dear Ursula, is word for word what we spoke at that famous interview.

"My confidence in the vicomte is boundless; I am convinced that he will save me.

"Ah, name and wealth, how gladly would I give both for Don Jose's love!

"But, no! He knows that he can never love me, and fables obstacles between us. Every one knows that he is rich. To be convinced that he is of noble birth, one has only to look at him. He lies to me through pity. The parable of the worm refers to me and not to him.

"Good, so be it then! His mode of action shall be mine too. I, too, as soon as I shall have been saved through his energy, will try to prove myself worthier of him. I will not sigh nor complain. I will not shed a tear. I will love him silently until death.

"The stars sparkle in the firmament. I think of the poor worm. Oh, if I had wings how quickly would I go to you, you gentle, always cheerful and friendly lights.

"I am far from you, stars! Yet your rays fall upon me and throw a consoling gleam in my darkness and silence.

"Farewell, Ursula! I almost feel like crying, and yet I have never felt more happy and light-hearted!"

CHAPTER XVI

MAN AND WIFE

IN SPITE of Cyprienne's pretended satisfaction in presence of her mother, the latter did not permit herself to be deceived by the assurances given by her daughter in a moment of unconsidered enthusiasm.

The poor woman already bore such heavy burdens on her conscience—burdens the nature of which we shall soon know—that she did not wish to increase them by a new one by seeing her daughter made unhappy, without, at least, making efforts to hinder such a thing.

The moment seemed to be a good one.

The Count de Puysaie, who seemed to be suffering with a secret sorrow, became more friendly to his wife and daughter every day.

Nini Moustache, for whom he had sacrificed everything, had broken with him, and this grieved him deeply. He was a weak man, and needed a creature whose affection held him up.

He had believed—and what solitary sufferer has not had the same illusions—that Nini Moustache was really attached to him.

He thought he had earned her devotion, and now saw himself suddenly robbed of it at the very moment in which

he did not possess anything else in the world which could console and ease his heart.

When, therefore, his wife begged him for an interview, he consented without a moment's hesitation.

He was lying on a sofa in a room partly darkened.

"To what am I indebted for the honor of your visit, madame?" he asked.

"You ask me? Are you not suffering?"

"That is a good reason, indeed," replied the count, bitterly; "but as no one hears us we might find a better one."

"Ah!" murmured the countess, "I am lost. You will never forgive me."

The count raised himself up from the sofa.

"I am not a God that forgives everything, madame," he said.

He then continued in his usual flippant way:

"Enough of tragedy! Deceived husbands belong to the comic repertory—that is a well-known thing! The lover is the hero; the husband, the fool. Besides, the wrong was entirely on my side. I was rich; your family was satisfied with me. I was anxious about our common future—all things to make a man ill-humored and disagreeable. My rival, on the other hand, was young, almost a boy, yet poetical as a dream, poor as the shepherd in the fable. You could not hesitate which to choose, and I was a fool to count upon it."

He got up as he said these words and strode up and down the room.

"He had everything in his favor, that good-for-nothing —even a romantic, emotional death in exile."

The countess became pale as death.

"Mercy! mercy!" she cried, "do not stain the memory of the Chevalier d'Aliges."

"You defend him?" replied the count, angrily. "Then you still love him!"

"Have I ever loved him?" she sighed. "Ah, let us let the dead rest."

"It will come to pass," observed the count, sarcastically, "that he was right, and I was the guilty one!"

"No," said the countess, "I alone am guilty. Heap your reproaches on me, Loredan, and you shall see that I will not complain. Have I ever become indignant when you only reproached me? Have I not, on the contrary, blessed the hand which struck me? Never say a word against the memory of the Chevalier d'Aliges. Do not make my daughter, your Cyprienne, forever unhappy."

"My Cyprienne!" murmured the count—"my Cyprienne! How can you dare to pronounce this name in my presence? Do you think to—"

He paused, but his lips continued in a more quiet tone:

"Listen to me, madame. The mistake, which was at first only on your side, has become a double one. To-day I feel just as criminal as you, and the only penance which is permitted me to lay upon you, is to show you the depth of the abyss into which you have plunged us. The fall of a great rich family is like the crumbling of a building. No matter how old it is, as long as the foundation is in its place everything keeps together; but should it be taken out, all crumbles in ruins. I myself have brought about the ruin of the race of Puysaie. You, madame, with your white hands and pink nails, have torn out the first stone."

The countess attempted to speak, her husband waved his hand in token of silence, and continued:

"You yourself provoked this explanation. I beg you, therefore, not to interrupt me. It is true—for I must say everything, even what appears to excuse you—that at our wedding I paid too little attention to your affections. The widowed Marquise de Simeuse, your only relative, on whom you were dependent, forced this marriage. Madame de Simeuse, who had become acquainted with my father during the emigration, and loved me like a son, determined to make us both rich at once, by marrying us to one another, and presenting us with her estates in the Vendee, Poitou, and Brittany."

The count seated himself on a chair, and then continued:

"You had never seen me. I did not know you either. You received your education on a distant estate of your aunt's. One evening a young man about twenty-five years of age arrived at Simeuse in the mail-coach. Your aunt said to you: 'Hortense, that is your husband.' Immediately afterward the mayor, with his scarf of office, appeared. Four peasants in the neighborhood acted as witnesses. The vicar of the parish performed the religious ceremony in the chapel. You only had time at dinner to become acquainted with your new husband. He was as agreeable as he could possibly be. You were charming, though a little timid—you were still so young. That very evening, just after the dessert, I had to go away. The man whose name you then bore, took the mail-coach to St. Nazaire, where a ship awaited him to take him to England. An important mission from the new government called him to London. Besides, you were still too young

to get married. The ceremony which took place that day was only a kind of engagement. The real marriage was postponed for six months, until the conclusion of my mission!"

The count made a short pause, and then continued:

"You see, Hortense, that I have not attempted to justify anything. Yes, I married you through ambition, without knowing you, almost forcibly. You, too, bowed to the will of the Marquise de Simeuse. I do not reproach you for not being faithful, but for the hypocrisy with which you attempted to mask it. If you had told me, when I returned from my diplomatic mission: 'Monsieur de Puysaie, I am your wife in name, but not at heart; my aunt and you have abused my youth and applied force to my conscience,' I would certainly have felt unhappy, but would not have had the privilege to-day to condemn you."

The countess opened her lips to reply, but her husband prevented her from speaking, and continued:

"But no; you received me with the cheerful smile and naive tenderness of a young wife, who is happy to be so, and for a few weeks I thought I had found that rarity in marriage, a unanimity of head and heart. Six months later, I learned of the secret stay of the Chevalier d'Aliges under my roof, a stay which was clearly proved by the premature birth of Cyprienne."

The Countess shook her head.

Her husband continued:

"Ah, I know it! At first I did not attempt to explain my repulsion for you and your daughter. Every one blamed me. I let those blame me who felt like it. I was called a bad husband and a hardened father. I preferred to bear this injustice rather than betray you.

I permitted you and permit you still to play the part of a martyr. But when we are alone together, madame, the situation changes. You will permit me, on your side, to give utterance to my contempt, when you try to instil pity in me by referring to the lot of MY daughter, just as I may be permitted to give utterance to my ANGER when you defend the memory of your lover against my just hate."

"The Chevalier d'Aliges was never my lover!" exclaimed the countess, "Cyprienne is your daughter, so help me God."

"Really?" replied the count. "Will you dare to maintain that statement after you have read this here?"

With these words the count quickly hurried to his writing-desk and took from a secret drawer a piece of paper.

"Do you recognize this, madame?" asked the count.

"Yes," sobbed the countess as she covered her face with her hands.

"Listen to what this letter, without signature or date, says," said the count.

He then read:

" 'Into what an abyss you insnared me! If he comes back! The trace of our crime is so palpable to the eyes that I cannot conceal it from him.'

"The 'He' am I," said the count bitterly, and then read further:

" 'Do not shut your ears to the cry I send you. It is one of necessity. My brain is on fire! I am losing my senses. You have plunged me in crime, and my only hope of escape lies with you.'

"Is that clear?" asked Loredan de Puysaie, "or shall

I read you the second note, which you know just as well as the first, the note in which you inform your accomplice of the birth of a daughter? Do you understand? A daughter, that is the one you call MY daughter Cyprienne. Go on! Imagine something, any plausible lie. Defend yourself! Defend the chivalric Chevalier d'Aliges. Prove to me that this paper comes from a forger, or that I do not understand the meaning of the words. I am waiting, madame, and really curious to know your answer."

"I," murmured the countess, "have nothing else to say, except that these letters are mine; that Cyprienne is, nevertheless, YOUR daughter, and that the Chevalier d'Aliges is innocent."

"Then unhappy—" cried the count.

He gave one more proof of his wonderful self-control.

"No matter what was the name of your accomplice," he continued, "the result is the same. This result is, that I have been plunged into an abyss. I no longer possess ambition, courage, or love. Yes, Hortense, I would have loved you. Ah, what strength I would have drawn out of this sacred affection! But, no! Distrust arose between the ice-cold stones of our hearth. Confidence was no longer possible between us. I became low-spirited, abandoned my dreams of greatness and happiness. Should I work for the child of adultery? What for? I cut loose from the sacred embraces of daughter and wife, and in this magnificent mansion, wherein an army of servants move—in this house, wherein you shine like a queen—in this house I have, envied by all, lived alone."

The count paused.

His wife did not dare to interrupt him, and in a short while he again continued:

"From that time on—and here my mistake begins, the mistake of which you must accept the greater part—I sought outside of my house for what I did not find in it. Happiness was lost forever, and I followed its shadow. I lost everything in following it—my physical and moral energy, my blood, my heart, my brain, my fortune, and my honor. You have nothing to envy me for, Hortense. I am to-day just as miserable as you are. We can look boldly at each other. Just like two galley-slaves, who are chained together, neither of us need blush for the other."

"But why should we make a poor innocent child suffer for our mistakes? Ruin threatens us, you say—but what of it? Is not ruin penance? You are right, Loredan, I alone am guilty. And if you knew how guilty I am! More than you imagine. Let us take courage, though, my friend! Let us quietly submit to the fate we ourselves brought about. You have debts, Loredan. We shall pay them, even though I have to sacrifice my last diamond and work for our living. Let us draw a sponge across the past. I wish only to retain one recollection of it—that of my false step, and the misfortune it brought about. I shall always have that recollection before my eyes, as well as your generosity."

The countess paused a moment, and then continued:

"I do not ask for pardon for my sake, for I feel myself unworthy of it, but for her sake, Loredan; for when I shall be dead she will learn the terrible secret of my life. Then, perhaps, you will regret your hastiness, and Cyprienne's unhappiness will be a cruel reproach for you."

"But will you not tell me everything now?" asked the count. "What is there so terrible in your confession that it surpasses the shame of your first mistake?"

"I implore you, Loredan, ask me no more!" stammered the countess. "I cannot and dare not tell you anything more if I do not wish to bring about an irretrievable misfortune, for which I should hold myself responsible. Ah, my conscience already almost succumbs under the weight it has to bear. Know only, and believe, that Cyprienne is really your daughter, and that you must love, protect and defend her. Believe in my word more than in these letters. They prove my mistake; but, if they proved it less clearly, I would not hesitate to confess it. More they do not prove, more they cannot prove; and on my deathbed I would still cry: 'Loredan, curse me, but love and honor Cyprienne, your daughter!'"

"I believe you, madame," said the count. "You know our situation. Cyprienne's marriage is, to my idea, our only salvation. But if you think the secret grounds, which are authoritative for you, are stronger, then state them. Cyprienne must bring me the answer to-morrow which I must send to Baron Matifay. Dictate the same to her. No matter how it reads, it will be respected."

The countess wished to seize her husband's hand to kiss it; he quickly pulled it back.

"Good-by," he said. "Leave me. I am sick and tired of life. You owe me no thanks, for I do not succumb on account of gentleness or conviction, but from fatigue."

"God be praised!" murmured the countess, as she left the room, "Cyprienne is saved!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE UNKNOWN TYRANT

THE poor woman had successfully accomplished the first part of her work.

Almost at the same time, though, an invincible obstacle crossed her path.

This obstacle was in the form of Colonel Fritz.

With coat buttoned up to his chin, firmly shut lips and wrinkled eyebrows, he waited in the reception-room until the end of this interview, the secret of which he soon divined.

When he saw the countess come out with her face lighted up by smiles he suspected that his *role*, if not entirely played out, was nevertheless in great danger, and that he could only take it up again by means of a bold stroke.

"Death or victory!" was the battle cry of this terrible dealer in souls.

With stiff strides, like an automaton, he approached the countess.

"Hortense," he said, briefly, "I must speak with you."

"What do you want of me?" she asked, in trembling tones.

"You shall soon find out, madame."

He carried rather than led her to her room.

She entered it more dead than alive, and let herself fall in a rocking-chair.

He followed her carefully, examined all the doors to see if they were closed, and said:

"I want our daughter to be rich."

"Our daughter!"

"Yes, madame, OUR daughter. You have tried in vain to steal and abduct her from me. I shall find her sooner or later, I assure you, even though I have to go through every school in Paris. Up till then I shall work for her, and will not permit her to be cut out by her sister, Cyprienne de Puysaie."

"Her sister!" exclaimed the countess. "You know very well that it is not true."

"At least she is from your side, madame," replied the colonel, coldly, "and for that reason she is entitled to half her mother's fortune. I am in possession of a certificate from Dr. Toinon, who was present at Lila's birth, and the testimony of the Gosses, who brought her up. Nothing is easier than to prove her identity."

"But what do you want? what do you ask?"

"I ask you not to force me to create a scandal and defend our daughter."

The countess wished to reply, but the invincible coldness of the colonel caused the words to die on her lips.

"Listen to me, madame," he continued. "We understand paternal love, as I see, in different ways. I do not know whether you know the story of a certain smart bird. It generally laid its eggs in the nest of a bird of different degree—a nightingale, for instance—but yet it did not desert its progeny on that account. Seated on a neigh-

boring tree, he watched their growth. The little animal the more it grows the greedier it gets. It needs, to be satisfied, not only the portion which its foster-parents give it, but all portions. Now his real mother comes to his assistance and throws the breed of the nightingale out of the nest and on to the ground, where they miserably expire. You will not think ill of me, madame, if I follow an example which nature offers me, and I think you too intelligent to insult you by explaining La Fontaine's forgotten fable any further."

"To tell the truth," said the countess, bitterly, "you have begun your work well. Through misuse of letters written you after Lila's birth and intrusted to your honor you made Cyprienne's father suspect her. She it is who is at present looked upon as the child of crime. But do you not fear that your victim will cry out aloud if you torture her too much? Suppose I tell my husband everything?"

The colonel shook his head and laughed maliciously.

"I am not afraid of that," he said. "You would place the count in great danger by doing so. He would challenge me to a duel, and then he would be a dead man."

"No! no!" exclaimed the unhappy woman. "I shall not do it, and you know very well that this last threat was superfluous. How should I confess that I believed a man like you? That would be the climax of shame and humiliation. To have loved you—you! the common traitor and robber! to have loved you, and to confess it—rather a hundred deaths!"

"That is what I counted on," replied Fritz, as he bowed sarcastically. "I am thankful to you that you judge me, and especially my projects, so favorably."

The countess stood there with indignation on her face. Her eyes shot flames, her bosom heaved, she looked superb.

"That," she said to herself, "that is all that I can get out of him—low, common irony. He belongs to the race of snakes. No matter what he does, he cannot leave off creeping. Even in shame one can be bold, strong, and manly, but he is always coarse and low."

"Take care, madame," replied the colonel—"take care that I do not answer in a different tone from what I have done. Your proud, contemptuous mien does not impose on me. Therefore I advise you not to anger me, for I would crush you like a reed. In the person of your Cyprienne and in that of your count I could torture you. Your heart has not a corner which is unknown to me."

He paused a moment, and then continued in his usual ironical tone:

"You call me a snake? Yes, if necessary, I will be one. Oh, you do not know how much I hate you all. I will not try to justify this hate. Good or bad, I am so and cannot be otherwise. My mother probably nourished me with gall. I was young, just like another, perhaps handsome and rich. Yet I swear to you that even when I was well off there was never a moment when I did not envy some one. Hundreds of thousands of francs income, a countess for a friend, a duke or peer's title, that is not enough. The soul of Cesare Borgia lives in me. Why was I not born in those days, when the knife of the bandit carved a throne! I would have become a great man then, and you would have admired and loved me."

He made another pause, went a few times up and down the room, and then stood in front of the countess.

"I do not accuse society," he said. "We were born to be conquerors, and society has made adventurers of us. What shall become of me? What shall the soul of Catiline do in the body of a poor man—the ambition of Sesostris in the brain of a law-clerk? I have often thought over it. The time of Brutus is over; I would have been guillotined like a common scoundrel. Yet Paris offers a wide field, and one can secure a good position here; only it does not belong to the strong, but to the most cunning. Such a position I have attained, madame, and hold in my hand a whole army of which I appear to be one of the privates. It looks as if I served it, while in reality it serves me. I stand on the threshold of your—that means my—triumph."

The countess appeared not to understand these last words, but before she could ask a question, the colonel continued:

"At this moment you stand in my way, and hope that I will not crush you. You know my secret now, and you must either obey me or be annihilated. I tell you this so that you can understand the necessity of this alternative, and so that on my side no weakness will prevent me from putting my foot on your neck."

Nini Moustache was right. He was a wonderful actor.

The countess listened to him in terror.

The Satan—Colonel Fritz thought himself a Satan—kept silent.

He wiped the perspiration from his brow, and continued:

"There was a time when I might have become different. For a few months I saw the dawn of hope arise, and it was you, Hortense, who produced this. At that

time I would have desisted in my plans for one smile from you.

"I made the acquaintance of the Chevalier d'Aliges during the time of his exile and unhappy love. He died in my arms, and his last word—his last breath—was for you. I undertook the commission of carrying this last word, this last sigh, to you. In this way I made your acquaintance, and as soon as I had exchanged a glance with you, I said to myself: 'This woman must love me!'

"You were very unhappy. The count neglected you; you were separated from your daughter—a wife, and yet a widow. Your confidence in the friend of the chevalier was your ruin. Yet I swear to you I loved you so much that I almost became a good man again. Do you remember with what joy I greeted Lila's birth?—I, who had hated throughout my whole life? I said to myself, with joy: 'That means love, then!'

"Such happiness could not last long. You tortured me with your remorse and your reproaches. I thought you had extinguished the last spark of hate in my heart. You made me become better acquainted with it than I had ever been before.

"Yes, I hate your husband. I hate him because he was the only obstacle in the way of your charitable work. I hate him because he did not understand you. I hate him because he forces me to do you harm. Remorse drew you from me, and probably caused you to return to him. I digged an abyss between you two. Slander, shameful accusations—anything was right to me. Out of the letters you wrote me, I took the terrible proofs against you and the Chevalier d'Aliges. I did

it, and do not regret it. There is only one more living spot in my heart—my love to Lila, my daughter.

"You injured me in this love! Lila has been abducted from me, and now you want me to forgive you?

"You do not count on that? I will repay the sorrows I have suffered through Lila a hundred-fold by punishing you through Cyprienne.

"I need the name of the Count de Puysaie, the millions of Baron Matifay, all greatness and all riches to crown my Lila with, and I will get what I want, have no fear.

"To do it, though, I need a tool, and Cyprienne shall serve me. To-day she is a means to me; to-morrow, should she become an obstacle, she will be lost.

"The last depends on you, madame. If there is still a refuge left you from fate, be convinced that it lies in the single word—obedience."

With these words, the colonel bowed triumphantly and left the room.

When he had gone, the Countess de Puysaie breathed more freely.

What was the evil which threatened her daughter Cyprienne in case the latter refused to submit?

She did not know. Yet one thing was certain: Colonel Fritz would not hesitate at any crime to secure the success of his project.

To whom should she go for aid? Her husband, the count?

Ah, what could such a weak man do against an energetic trickster?

Only one ray of hope was still shining for her:

Obedience to her unknown tyrant.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HEAVENS CLOSE AGAIN

[*From the Blue Diary*]

"FOR a week I have not seen my mother or my father except at table. The latter came very seldom to the dining-room, and rarely spoke a word. My mother looked sadder and more low-spirited than ever.

"Only Colonel Fritz appeared to be the same as usual.

"It looked as if the moment for a decided answer from me had come.

"I have not heard a word from the vicomte since I saw him, probably for the last time, in the conservatory of the Countess of Monte-Cristo.

"Can he too have forsaken me?

"This morning Florent came to me again and informed me my father desired to speak with me.

"You can imagine how much I trembled when I followed at the servant's heels.

"What answer should I give him?

"I did not know myself.

"My mother was also in my father's room, and he spoke to her first.

"'Hesitation any longer is impossible,' he said. 'Your decision, madame, must be arrived at to-day, no matter

how it reads. You know, too, that I have laid our common fate in your and Cyprienne's hands. Confer with one another, and dictate then the answer I shall give to Baron Matifay.'

"My mother, then, had conquered the obstinacy of my father, and I was saved.

" 'Oh, mother!' I exclaimed.

" 'Wait, Cyprienne.'

"She was so excited that she could hardly speak.

"My father stood with his arm on the mantel-piece and silently observed us.

" 'My daughter,' said my mother, 'you believe that I love you, do you not? You know, too, that I would sacrifice my life for yours?'

" 'Yes, yes.'

" 'And you have confidence in me, and do not doubt that the answer I shall ask you to make is the best for you?'

"This hesitation, these reiterations proved to me that my unhappiness was irretrievable.

"I wished to answer 'yes,' again, but I could not utter a word, and therefore restrained my tears and kept silent.

" 'Ah!' exclaimed my mother, 'do you want me to die of despair and shame?'

"She arose and stretched out her arms. I suspected that she wished to throw herself at my feet, and foiled it by clasping her in my arms.

" 'Not a word more, mamma,' I said. 'I shall marry the baron.'

"I felt, however, when I said these words, my heart draw together.

"I was not able to keep back my tears any longer, and sank sobbing in a chair.

"My father hurried toward me.

"My mother lay on the other side of the chair and kissed my hand.

"'I thank you, Cyprienne! I thank you, my daughter!' she stammered.

"I felt her hot tears on my hand.

"'Madame,' said my father, gravely, 'in the mistake itself God laid the seed of penance. The birth of this poor, deserted child has been, as I now see, a blessing for my house.'

"So saying, he stretched out both arms, my mother threw herself on his bosom, and he kissed her on the forehead.

"He then turned to me.

"'The sacrifice you make for us, my daughter, belongs to the category of those which can never be forgotten. I have been at times a strict and unjust father toward you, and your noble conduct to-day makes me feel the more my harshness toward you. Forgive me! You can do it, while I never can forgive myself.'

"'My dear father! My dear mother!'

"More I could not say. All disagreement between my parents was at an end now. They had become attached to each other again, and I was the one who brought about this happy consummation.

"Unfortunately I had to pay dear for it, but had I, as a child, a right to complain?

"No. My martyred heart almost thought its torture sweet, and for the first time I knew what the painful joy of self-sacrifice was.

"I have returned to my room.

"I wept, Ursula, I cried very much; the conviction, though, of having done a great and burdensome duty is refreshing and healthy, and these tears did me good.

"I must restrain my tears, I must appear to be calm and happy.

"When, therefore, a few hours later, my mother knocked at my door, she found me smiling.

"With a calm face I listened to the news that I was to be introduced to Baron Matifay that very evening, and I dressed myself without a sigh or a tear.

"I chose the same dress I wore when I went to the Bois de Boulogne.

"I forgot nothing, not even the white rose in my hair.

"The poor rose! It had been the emblem of my hopes; it was now the emblem of my misfortune.

"I will save this rose. It is the only souvenir of my three happy days that I shall keep.

"When I entered the grand drawing-room, my father and Baron Matifay were already present.

"At my entrance they arose, and the baron greeted me in an awkward way.

"They continued their conversation a few minutes longer, then my father went away, and left me alone with my sixty-year-old intended.

"He was at least sensible enough to come to the point at once.

" 'I fear, mademoiselle,' he began, 'that your father asked too much obedience to his orders from you.'

" 'My father gives me no orders, baron,' I replied; 'his mere wish is sufficient for me.'

" 'Then, mademoiselle, I can and dare hope—'

"'You see,' I interrupted him, 'that I am here.'

"He seized my hand and pressed his thick lips upon it.

"'You are an angel!' he said.

"'No, baron,' I replied, with a faint smile, 'I am not an angel, I only hope that I will be a good and faithful wife to you.'

"'A wife! An angel! Anything you wish!' he cried, enthusiastically. 'You shall not regret not having refused me.'

"The enthusiasm of the brave man affected me a little, I confess.

"'I know your history, baron,' I said, 'and am aware that you are very good and benevolent.'

"'If I were not so I would become so at your side. Ah, if you knew, Cyprienne—I beg your pardon—Mademoiselle Cyprienne!—everything is not rose-colored in my life. I am so lonely! Sometimes at night when my servants sleep, I wander about my house with a candle in my hand. Everything is empty and dreary. And the recollections—oh, how terrible! In the daytime things go better. I am at my office, people are there, the clerks come and go, the pens scribble the paper, the gold pieces jingle in the wooden bowls. But the night, the night!'

"He wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"'When you are with me, Mademoiselle Cyprienne,' he continued, 'these ideas will not arise again; your youth and innocence will lighten my gloomy house. I will work for you. You will do good to me—much good, will you not? You are no doubt philanthropic. When I saw you the first time, I fell in love with you. You are so handsome. At that time I did not yet know you. I thought

you were like the others, on the lookout for wealth and a name. Now when I know you better, I ask you: Do you want to be my providence?'

"The poor man! He sits with his millions as lonely as the squatter in the gold desert of the Californian mines. In the night he no doubt sees the pale phantom of poor Blanche, his foster-daughter, whom he loved so tenderly, and who had to die so young under the Neapolitan sky.

"It is for some one to replace her in his heart and in his house that he is looking. He does not ask a wife of Heaven, but a daughter.

"This thought made me entirely tranquil, and this time I offered him my hand of my own accord.

"'If it only depends on me, baron, you shall be very happy,' I said.

"You see, Ursula, that this great misfortune is not as terrible a one as I feared. I consecrate my life to the happiness of an old man, who is very good and who loves me like a father. Ah, why did I make the vicomte's acquaintance?

"Yet what is the difference, since he told me we could never become man and wife, as he did not love me?

"Ah, if he had loved me, Ursula, I would have resisted in spite of my father's low-spiritedness and my mother's despair. The baron's sorrow would have moved me, but I would never have put my hand in his.

"The vicomte though does not love me.

"I have just read for probably the hundredth time the three short notes which are the only proofs that he ever crossed the path of my life.

"I then held them one after the other to the candle and burned them to ashes.

"What remains of them at this moment? A mass of black dust.

"What has come of my beautiful dream—a few ashes?

"I tenderly tied them up in a bundle with the rose.

"Now I am calm.

"I can pray. God sent me a consolation in my martyrdom. Love is dead, but self-sacrifice still lives.

"I approach the window; I look out upon the silent night and think.

"Listen too, Ursula, to the pretty fable I relate to myself.

" 'There was once a princess, who was so unhappy that nothing was left to her but her eyes to cry with.

" 'The king, her father, and the queen, her mother, who had become separated by a wicked magician, had exiled her from their palace, and when they recalled her it was merely to marry a king, their neighbor, who was old, ugly and deformed.

" 'The poor princess wept a great deal, and they locked her up in a tower a hundred feet high and told her that she would only come out to marry Baron Matifay.

" 'One day she stood on the balcony of her tower and thought of her dreary fate, when she heard a voice call through the darkness:

" 'Cyprienne!'

"I had just got that far with my fable, when I really heard a voice call me from below:

" 'Cyprienne!'

"I raised my head, and through the open window something fell on the carpet and rolled to my feet.

"It was a small stone, around which a piece of paper was tied.

"Another note from the vicomte.

"A single glance was sufficient for me to read it. It contained the following lines:

"'In the name of your eternal happiness, Cyprienne, in the name of your honor, listen to my prayer. It is known that you have consented to marry Baron Matifay. This marriage is impossible. This man is a monster. Oh, listen to me, believe me! I must see you, I must speak to you, I must make you break this engagement. If you listen to me, dear victim, hold your candle out of your window, and the most faithful of your servants will hurry to your aid, and—who knows?—perhaps bring salvation with him.'

"My eternal happiness!—the honor of my name!—the man I had promised to marry was a monster!

"These positive declarations left only *one* alternative. Either I really stood at the edge of an abyss, or the vicomte was a malicious slanderer.

"I went to the window and opened the shutters. A shadow was clearly outlined on the sand of the lane, just underneath my window.

"How had the vicomte got there? I do not know. When he saw me he stretched his clasped hands toward me.

"Instinctively I seized the candle, and held it out of the window.

"The vicomte came up the stairs, and in a few minutes stood right near my door.

"His heart beat so loudly that I could distinctly hear it.

"'Cyprienne,' he said in a low voice, 'calm yourself. Your confidence makes me your slave. Every drop of

my blood belongs to you. Only one wish lives in me. To rescue you, and then die.'

"He opened the door and showed me his pale face.

" 'I beg you to leave the room!' I exclaimed.

" 'Cyprienne,' he replied, 'I don't want you to think ill of my plans. Go and get your mother. I will wait here.' "

CHAPTER XIX

THE SEALED ENVELOPE

ON THE same day, and at the same hour, when Cyprienne gave her hand to Baron Matifay two scenes closely connected with the drama we are relating took place at the two most distant ends of Paris.

One of them in an obscure attic of the Rue Faubourg Montmartre, the other in the magnificent mansion of the Countess of Monte-Cristo.

The Vicomte de la Cruz walks impatiently up and down the hothouse, in which we heard him assure Cyprienne of his devotion.

This hothouse is an agreeable place. The water murmurs and splashes in the marble fountain, and the tropic plants unfold their fiery magnificence of color.

The vicomte does not pay the slightest attention to his surroundings.

Feverish impatience twitches in his hands. The pallor of his cheeks and his lips, the gloomy fire which shines forth from his eyes—everything denotes that he has received some ill news.

Suddenly he stood still.

A light step creaked on the sand of the hothouse and the rustle of a dress was heard.

A white hand was laid on his shoulder; he turned around and saw the Countess of Monte-Cristo in front of him.

How different, though, did she look now from what she did in public!

She was also pale; her eyes were red and a cloud was on her brow.

"Something important must have brought you here to-day," she said to the vicomte.

"Yes, Helene," replied the vicomte, "I know that you celebrate each year the day you were buried alive. During that anniversary you lock yourself in your grave. In the meantime the wicked continue their work, and what can I do against them, if you rob me of your assistance, Helene?"

"Come then, my son," said the countess, "you, my best and most devoted friend, have the right to enter the grave in which my recollections rest."

With firm steps she went on in advance to one of the outermost points of the hothouse, and he followed.

He strode through, behind her, a row of parlors and a beautiful bedroom, and then entered a dark room, which was dimly lighted from above by a hanging lamp.

It was a kind of sarcophagus. No furniture, except a praying-stool and a kind of altar, was seen. On the altar lay several objects—two locks of hair, one brown and one blond, two portraits of gentlemen, one almost similar to the other, no doubt brothers, and a large sealed envelope under a glass case.

That was all.

Over the altar hung an ivory crucifix.

"This," said the Countess of Monte-Cristo, as she

pointed to the locks of hair and the portraits, "is all that remained to me from my unhappy life. This," she continued, as she raised her white hand to the Saviour, "is the only strength which keeps me alive. You are the only one, Jose, except myself, who has ever crossed this threshold. Here the noise of the outside world ceases. Now, speak. What do you wish?"

"Helene," replied Jose, gravely, "I mourn with you the noble dead you weep for. I have done for you and yours everything I could. I did it without thought of reward; to-day, however, I shall ask for one."

The Countess of Monte-Cristo stretched out her hand toward the sealed envelope, and said:

"Do you recollect Biasson's words: 'This paper contains your reward and my justification.' This letter belongs to you, Jose; you can open it."

Jose attempted to break the seal, but thought better of it, and desisted.

"No, Helene; I have sworn not to read the contents of this letter until Rancogne re-enters the castle of his fathers as a conqueror, with head erect. On that day I will open it."

"Then," sighed the countess, "it will never come to pass, for Blanche, my poor daughter, is dead!"

"Who knows?" murmured Jose.

"We are only too well aware of it. The news we received from Naples was very distinct."

"I doubt it, nevertheless!" exclaimed Jose. "Besides, what difference does it make whether she is dead or alive. If she lives we must find her again, and if she is dead we must revenge her."

"Revenge her?" repeated the countess. "No, Jose;

our mission is not a work of revenge, but of justification. I have come here to bring grace and not war. I am strong for the good, for the Lord is with me. If I undertook a work of anger, His hand would be withdrawn from my forehead, and I would be crushed. My daughter, that dear deceased, I should revenge! Yes, I often thought of it; but that is why I lock myself up here every year—to avoid this temptation; and I pray, I weep, I humble myself. And they speak to me from the depths of their graves, they advise me, they let godlike gentleness and charity enter my soul. To speak in this place of revenge, Jose, is almost blasphemy."

"Good, then," replied Jose; "but shall we let the others continue their wicked work without resisting? These scoundrels have murdered your husband, your brother, your daughter. They took everything from you, even your name. They made of you a spectre, without a country, a family, or a distinct position in the world. Let us pardon them that, since you wish it. But do you wish to permit them to increase the number of their victims, and have them plunge them likewise into the abyss out of which you escaped through a miracle? Will you permit Cyprienne to marry that man, whose name I dare not pronounce here for fear of disturbing the rest of the dead? No, Helene, no! We cannot, we must not do that!"

Don Jose paused, but as the countess made no reply, he continued:

"Listen to me. Let me work alone. I take the responsibility upon my shoulders. You can remain the tranquil, kind-hearted providence, but permit me to personify rage and justice. I do not ask anything more of you, Helene—but this I beg on my knees, and as the only

reward for all my future troubles—I only ask you to help me save Cyprienne. From Madame Jacquemin I have just learned that the young girl promised to obey. You alone, Helene, can gain time. I only need time—a few weeks or a few days. To-morrow I shall begin my battle with Matifay. Champion, himself, shall serve as my weapon, and who knows if I may not be so happy as not only to save Cyprienne, but to restore your daughter to you also?"

"Folly!" murmured the Countess of Monte-Cristo. "Blanche is dead. Yet I know I have not the right to refuse you anything, Jose. My happiness is over. I shall not be an obstacle in the way of yours. Cyprienne is worthy of you, and you are worthy of Cyprienne. Go wherever fate leads you. You shall always find me ready to assist you. If Cyprienne knocks at the doors of this house, they will open. My name must not be pronounced in Cyprienne's presence. For your sake I shall work upon the mother, so that you can gain the necessary amount of time."

"God bless you!" murmured Jose.

The countess shook her head sorrowfully.

"I am very tired," she said; "I have never felt so tired. I think my time will soon come, for I have never felt so low-spirited as now. How many unfortunates of every description have we not rescued since five years! Hunger, sorrow, misery, even remorse seemed to be banished at our approach. To-day we are opposed to Matifay and Champion for the second time. My hand is stretched out toward Madame Jacquemin. I wish to rescue her and her son. I strike upon Nini Moustache, that is Champion. I take Ursula under my protection, and Champion is

again my opponent. The Countess de Puysaie throws herself at my feet; I receive her tearful confession; I wish to call to her: 'Stand up—you have been pardoned,' but between us comes Colonel Fritz—that is Matifay—and Champion is, without doubt, behind it, for Champion is everywhere."

The countess clasped her hands as she said this, held them toward heaven, and cried in a broken voice:

"Oh, Lord of my life, you know that I have resolved not to hate any one. Only one day in the year, this day, I have reserved for my sorrow and my mourning. All the others I have consecrated to my unfortunate sisters in God. I went out with full hands and have strewn the seed of charity everywhere. What causes these insects to cross my path continually, as if to call to me with all the voices of my indignation and my anger: 'You are still a woman, Helene! You have not forgotten anything; crush their heads, revenge the dead, revenge yourself!'"

She sank, while she still spoke, upon her prayer-stool, stretched out her arms in the struggle of her doubt and prayed like Jesus on the Mount of Olives: "Lord, take this cup of sorrow from my lips."

Jose stood there with folded arms; his forehead seemed to be touched by the breath of the pious prayer, and he looked at the praying woman with tender interest.

It was a long time before the Countess of Monte-Cristo became herself again.

She spoke no more. Her lips hardly moved, and from time to time she gave utterance to a cry of distress.

Finally she opened her eyes, and, shaking off her torpor, she exclaimed:

"Go, Jose, go, my son. Our Father in heaven reads

into our souls. He who knows everything, knows that we did not seek this battle, that we do not make ourselves judges in our own affairs, and that we are not seeking revenge. No, the aim we pursue is a nobler and more worthy one. If He throws these scoundrels in our way, He does it no doubt because He wants to punish them through us. Forgiveness to those who have remorse, justice to the obstinate."

"Yes, so let it be!" exclaimed Jose, as he hurriedly withdrew.

With big strides he walked through the hothouse, left the house and entered a hack.

Twenty minutes later it paused in the alley where we have already seen the vicomte awaiting Madame Postel.

This time, too, the latter soon appeared. She leaned on the carriage door and gave the vicomte a key.

It was the one to the garden gate.

"Have you heard anything of Louis, vicomte?" asked the widow.

As she said this she pressed a lightly filled purse in the young man's hands.

"It is for him!" she said. "I fear he is committing follies again."

"Have no fear, Madame Jacquemin; we shall keep an eye on him. I will go to his employer and let you know to-night how he is."

The Vicomte de la Cruz had himself driven to the Place Vendome. Here he got out, took the direction toward the boulevards, and was soon in Clement's store.

Jose went up to Clement, who was working and singing as he used to do in the forest of Braconne, and clapping him on the shoulder, said:

"Is Louis Jacquemin here?"

"No," replied Clement, "he is still on a spree; formerly he used to get drunk whenever he saw her; to-day he gets drunk because he doesn't see her any more."

"The poor boy!" murmured Jose.

"I believe," continued Clement, "he is insane. Yesterday I went to look for him, and where do you think I found him? He sat heavily intoxicated in a dirty gin-mill, at the same table with a suspicious vagabond, an Italian, who calls himself Signor Cinella."

"Ah!" exclaimed Jose.

"Yes," continued Clement, "they divided money together, probably the spoils of some robbery. If you wish we will try once more to save him. I think, however, it is lost time; he is incorrigible."

"On the contrary," thought Jose to himself, "I think that now is just the time to save him!"

CHAPTER XX

LEGIGANT

"H. LEGIGANT, *Broker and Agent.*"

This stood in black letters on the copper plate of the entrance-door of a house in the Rue Faubourg Montmartre.

If a person entered through this door, he came to an antechamber in which there was nothing but a long bench.

At the two extreme ends of the antechamber or corridor were wire railings, with the inscription on one "Cashier," on the other "Office."

Persons who came here generally went to the last side.

In the office, which was rather small, sat three young clerks, whose steel pens scribbled incessantly on the lined paper from eight o'clock in the morning to five in the evening.

In the centre, above a flying door, stood the word "*Management.*"

In this office all kinds of business was done. Pawn-tickets and old Cashmere shawls were bought; Bordeaux wine and coals were sold; money was loaned to the sons

of wealthy parents, and ladies pecuniarily embarrassed could pawn their diamonds here, or their souls.

The door of the sacred chamber, that is, of the "Management," was seldom opened to customers, but for some persons it was never closed.

These favored individuals were small tradesmen of Paris. Furniture dealers, toilet sellers, keepers of furnished rooms, petty usurers, who sucked out the life-blood of the young of both sexes, and a few rich real-estate proprietors.

These last were not customers but shareholders.

Monsieur H. Legigant was, in fact, then manager of a Credit Mobilier which had never been authorized to exist.

The real-estate owners delivered their houses; the furniture dealers their furniture; the dressmakers their dresses; the jewellers and other tradesmen, the diamonds, laces, the cashmeres, the coaches, the horses, and, more or less, their souls.

Legigant watched over everything, managed everything, organized everything, and took all responsibility upon himself.

It is five o'clock. The office is being closed. The old cashier pulls off his writing-sleeves, stretches out his arms, and puts on his hat.

The three clerks also get up.

In the middle of a word they clap the books together and run noisily down the stairs.

Only Legigant himself does not move from the chair. He expects some one.

He is not alone either.

A small, feeble man sits in a dark corner on a divan.

The little man is clothed with the elegance of an old beau, he wears light-blue trousers, a blue frock with gold buttons and a yellow vest.

His blond hair cries, even at a distance:

"I am a wig?"

Legigant arises from his chair and walks up and down the room.

"The news the colonel will bring us is very important, then, dear friend?" asked the little man.

"I have told you twenty times that to-day will tell whether anything will come of Matifay's marriage or not."

"Very true," observed the other, "only I cannot see why—"

Legigant paused in his walk, and looked terribly at the little man.

The little man trembled and stammered:

"I do not say that to contradict you, dear friend; I am merely seeking information."

"Toinon," said Legigant, as he continued his walk, "you are a fool."

Dr. Toinon—for this little man is really our old acquaintance—heard this epithet without a murmur.

"What would you have been without me?" continued Legigant. "A miserable country doctor, whose yearly income would be, at the most, two thousand francs, and who would have to travel about in rain and storm. That would have been your lot. Instead of that you are a reputable physician here. Your clinic is never empty, your free consultations give you a philanthropic coating which is really affecting. You earn—outside of your share of our business—thirty thousand francs a year.

Have you therefore a reason to complain or to criticise my plans?"

"But I do not criticise your plans, dear friend, and neither do I complain. I would only like to know—"

"That means," interrupted Legigant, "you fear to risk the position I made for you if you continue to work in harmony with me. Do not try to deceive me! You would like to get out of the affair and would not hesitate to betray me."

"Oh!" protested the doctor.

"You are a good fellow, I know," interrupted Legigant in a contemptuous tone, "but you are phlegmatic, and awfully lazy, my poor Toinon. This forces me to tell you that you cannot get rid of me so easily. I need you yet. I did not make you rich on account of your pretty eyes. What I built up I can tear down again, with a single shove of my hand."

"But what you still want of me is nothing dangerous, is it?" murmured Toinon, becoming pale.

"That depends on the turn things take. I hope that no danger will come of it. If we succeed this time our profits will be estimated at millions."

"At millions!" exclaimed the doctor. "Out of whose pocket will they come?"

"You forget Matifay," replied Legigant.

"Brrr!" said Toinon, as he blew his fingers, "that burns! Matifay is a sharp fellow and won't give us the key to his cash-box. He fooled us the first time."

"That is why I will not spare him!" exclaimed Legigant. "This miserable hound has not even got the honor of a thief. I made a solemn oath that the money which we helped him to earn, and out of which he cheated us,

shall not do him any good. I will ruin him, though I do not get a penny out of his wealth. Yes, I will revenge myself on him though it brings my own fall about. I know very well, Toinon, that the game we are playing is a dangerous one."

The doctor's teeth chattered with fear.

"But, dear friend," he stammered, "I have not done anything to you, and—"

"What do I care?" interrupted Legigant, brutally.

He then continued in a more quiet tone:

"I tell you in advance it is a question of victory or death."

With these words Legigant arose from his chair, went two or three times up and down the room, clinched his fist and said:

"The colonel does not seem to be coming. I would give ten years of my life if he brings us good news."

Just then a ring was heard at the door.

Legigant hurried into the antechamber, and came back in company with Colonel Fritz.

"Good! good!" exclaimed Legigant, enthusiastically rubbing his hands. "Everything is all right! The little one consents. Matifay coos like a dove, and the marriage takes place in four weeks. Have you any news of Lila, Colonel?"

"None at all. All my inquiries have been fruitless."

"We shall renew them. This very day all our bloodhounds will be on the track. Confound it! The future heiress of Baron Matifay must not run wild so long."

"What good can that do us?" asked Toinon.

"Matifay marries Cyprienne de Puysaie," replied Legigant. "A gallant of his kind does not get a wife easily.

He makes her his sole heir. Well, Lila is Cyprienne's sister and the daughter of our friend Fritz. Do you see what I mean?"

"Yes, I begin to understand—yet I confess, dear friend—"

"Suppose an accident occurred to Matifay," cried Legigant, impatiently. "Then Cyprienne will be his heir. Should she on her side also meet—"

Now the doctor understood perfectly, and began to tremble violently.

"That is dangerous," he said; "and besides, the count and the countess would still be there."

"Ah, they are as good as disposed of!" exclaimed Legigant. "We have two good accomplices to take care of them—remorse and vice. As for the remorse, Colonel Fritz will awaken that, and I have provided the vice for the count in the person of Nini Moustache."

"Nini Moustache has disappeared," said the colonel.

"I know it," replied Legigant, "and know where she has taken refuge. I told her to go there myself, and I know what measures to take to force her to do our will. The fool began to feel remorse. But I knocked it out of her head, and upon my advice she took the four hundred thousand francs along which she had intended to restitute to the count."

The colonel intended to answer, but Legigant continued:

"Fear nothing, dear friend. This sum, which really belongs to our association, will not remain long in Nini's hands, and her virtuous plans will go with it. Only Ursula must be taken away from the Gosses, and brought to another place unknown to her sister. If the little one

is once in our power, Nini Moustache will do anything we say, if she only gets her sister back."

"Very good," said the colonel, "the pistol which will blow out Loredan's light of life is more than half loaded. I have seen Nini Moustache at work; she will not flicker long."

"Ursula," continued Legigant, "will be abducted inside of two days. All measures in this respect have been taken. Inside of three days Nini Moustache will begin her work of destruction with the count. The pious saint, the countess, is the only one left."

"Find Lila, and I will take care of the countess," said the colonel.

"Well, then, everything will be all right. In less than two or three months neither the count nor the countess will be in our way. In three months the mouthy baron will have completed his mission here, and the blond Cyprienne will not only inherit his millions, but those of her mother too. Then we shall bring Lila to the surface, and we shall claim in her name her portion of the inheritance. Thanks to our prudence, proofs in plenty are in existence, and we shall find a means to get rid of Cyprienne without making a noise. To whom will the millions fall but to Lila? that means Colonel Fritz, that means us. For the colonel knows that no joking can be done with Legigant, and friend Legigant is too smart not to have looked out for all emergencies."

"You need not threaten, Hercules," said Fritz, "I am in this whole affair nothing more than your tool. You have combined everything, and I am too grateful to you ever to think of betraying you."

"Yes, yes," growled Legigant. "It does no harm though to talk candidly to one another. A great deal of misunderstanding is avoided by that."

The three accomplices thereupon left the room.

They went down the stairs arm in arm, conversing and laughing like good friends.

At the gate they paused to take leave of each other.

"We are agreed, then?" asked Legigant for the last time.

His two accomplices nodded assent.

"You, colonel," continued Legigant, "go to the house now, and if anything new occurs let me know. You, doctor, go to the Rue Rambuteau. I know that Dr. Ozam is away for a day, he will not visit Pippiona to-day. Imagine any lie. Say that he sent you in his stead, or that you are the ward physician. You will not meet with any obstacle, for Cinella, the old scoundrel, is in the plot. As for poor Ursula, she is as innocent as a newborn babe. If you go to Cinella's you will find the situation of his pretended daughter very dangerous, and ask for a nurse for her. This nurse must be Ursula, you understand? The rest does not concern you. I shall tend to it myself."

With these last words Legigant hurried away.

One hour later he could be seen sitting in a low tavern, which had been dubbed by the guests with the characteristic name of the "Café to the Blue Sash."

With his elbows on the dirty table, Legigant conversed with two miserably clothed men, who were none other than Signor Cinella and Louis Jacquemin.

"You understand me now, boys," he said, "there is no danger, and the profits will be enormous. You protect virtue, and look out for yourselves at the same time. The

little one is like a lamb, and we must rescue her from the claws of the Gosses. I have been authorized by the family to treat with you about this affair."

"Yes, yes," said Cinella, "that is all very nice, yet I cannot be so cruel as to betray the poor child. She is so good to my poor Pippiona!"

"Who says that we shall betray her?" cried Jacquemin, who was half intoxicated. "This good friend says that she will be saved."

"Certainly," observed Legigant; "this young man's right. You are mistaken, Cinella."

"Well, I'm satisfied," replied the Italian. "You understand it better than I do. Besides, the whole thing doesn't concern me. You pay well, and I will be able to provide poor Pippiona with certain delicacies."

At this moment two workmen entered the saloon.

They wore white blouses, and walked unsteadily, as if they had already been in the neighboring wine-rooms.

The two workmen were Clement and Joseph.

It was now seven o'clock. The Vicomte de la Cruz was not to appear before Cyprienne's astonished gaze until ten.

CHAPTER XXI

LOVE AND SORROW

[*From the Blue Diary*]

"'GO AND get your mother,' said Don Jose, as he remained motionless at the threshold.

"I regretted my distrust. In spite of the unusual hour, and in spite of the strangeness of the whole thing, I felt that I had nothing to fear from him.

"'My mother is doubtless already asleep,' I replied. 'If you have anything more to tell me, it will be best if I hear it alone. My poor mother has sufficient trouble already. Therefore come in, vicomte, I am ready to listen to you.'

"'He made two steps forward—only two steps.

"'Ah, Cyprienne,' he began, 'is it true then that you have agreed to marry this man?'

"'Yes, Don Jose,' I replied; 'I have consented and do not regret it. My foolish youthful fancies have disappeared from my memory. You yourself have done everything in your power to prove to me that these fancies could never be realized, and I am thankful to you for it, for you have induced me in that way to sacrifice my own happiness for that of my folks.'

"'I—I—Oh, do not say that, for it would make me insane. Shall I let you gaze into my heart? Shall I show

you my entire misery? Then know that I love you above everything, although social obstacles separate us forever. I love you as I have never loved a woman before, and as I shall never love another again. And yet if I saw you married to a man worthy of you, I would say: "It is well!" I would smile while despair tore my heart. But this Matifay! Have you not read the wickedness of his soul in his eyes? I tell you he is a monster, dirty and repulsive as a turtle and dangerous as an adder. Ah, if his life were known to you! If I had the right to tell it to you!'

"'That is your duty, otherwise I must regard you as a slanderer,' I replied, pale and trembling in every limb. 'Allegations prove nothing, vicomte. Whoever speaks as you have just done, must substantiate his words with proofs.'

"He gave no answer, but looked at me with a reproachful gaze.

"'Pardon, pardon!' I exclaimed, 'what shall I do?—what shall I say?—what shall I think? You tell me my future lord and master is a monster, and I am unfortunately only too eager to believe it, while all the others who surround me sound his praises. And really, a man who can be so moved by the death of a foster-daughter, as if she were his own child, cannot be a monster.'

"'I tell you,' replied Don Jose, in a cold tone, 'this man shoved his crime on the shoulders of the mother, and enriched himself with the fortune of the daughter whom he left to her fate in a foreign land, perhaps even got out of the way, for a Matifay does not shrink from any crime. Be convinced, Cyprienne, that if I give utterance to grave accusations, I am positive of their being well founded. If Matifay thinks of the past, he does not do it out of remorse,

but to shudder with terror. The spectres which pursue him are not the peaceful shadows, which sometimes appear at night at our bedside to recall dear beings to us who are lost to us forever, but mocking devils.'

"The vicomte himself was very pale, as if he saw one of the spectres of whom he was speaking.

" 'Cyprienne,' he continued, 'my hands are clean, my conscience is calm, and yet a cry echoes in my ears—a cry of fear, which this man often hears in his dreams. I have heard this cry, too, and will never forget it. Sometimes I awake from my sleep and imagine I still hear it. And yet I was not the murderer. I attempted to rescue the unfortunate man they murdered; I could not do it, though—I was only a boy then.'

"The vicomte made a short pause, and then continued:

" 'But a man has grown from the boy, and as Matifay stretches out his hand toward that which is the most precious thing on earth to me, then I, too, will be one of the spectres who pursue him—a spectre of flesh and blood, a living incarnation of revenge and justice.'

" 'I believe you, Don Jose,' I exclaimed, 'I believe you.'

" 'Then help me to rescue you, Cyprienne,' he said, 'or, rather, save yourself.'

" 'Speak! Advise me! I will do what you wish.'

" 'Good,' he began.

"He paused, and let his arms fall with a movement of despair.

"After a few moments he began again:

" 'But no! You will never do it. You could not believe me. How can I convince you that this way is the

only one which leads to your rescue? How can I ask you to leave your parents' home, and escape at night with a stranger? To seek far from your home a mightier protectress, whose name I am not at liberty to tell you?'

"He again made a short pause, and continued:

" 'Cyprienne, what I ask of you to-day is the blindest confidence in my honor and the purity of my love. Yes, you must leave this house, and, in fact, in an hour, a few moments, now. You must permit slander to stain your name. You must leave your folks in fear and uncertainty. You must resolve not to see them for some time, until I and others set aside the obstacles which separate us. You must have confidence, and believe that in all these things I am not led by any motives of personal interest, and that from the time I leave this room you will not see me again until you send for me. I love you, Cyprienne, as I would have loved my mother, whom I have never known. Yet I swear to you that I would never make such a proposition to you in the interest of my love. My honor is not at stake here, but your rescue. As soon as I see you in the coach which will bring you to your new protectress, I shall go away—forever, if you so desire.'

" 'I believe you, vicomte,' I replied as he paused; 'I cannot fear a moment that you will betray me. Yet I shall not go away from here. Or at least,' I added, 'I shall not go away until I have spoken to the person whom you yourself wished to call at the beginning of our interview. Your first words when you came here were: "Go and call your mother." If you have the courage to repeat your advice in the presence of my mother, and if she approves of it, I shall follow it.'

" 'I expected this resistance,' replied the vicomte,

calmly. 'Go and get your mother, Cyprienne, and I shall repeat my advice in her presence.'

"I went to my mother's room, which was next to mine, knocked at the door and entered.

"My mother had not yet retired.

"With her elbows on her writing-table, she had an open letter in front of her, and seemed to be lost in thought.

"At the noise I made in opening the door, she raised her head, and did not seem surprised to see me still awake.

"She folded the letter together, and put it in the bosom of her dress.

" 'It is you,' she said, and after a pause, added: 'I expected you.'

"I wished to answer her, and stammer an explanation she did not demand. She did not give me time, but stood up and approached me.

" 'I feared,' she continued, 'not to see you again. You cannot imagine with what joy I noticed that I had judged you correctly. Yes, Cyprienne, I expected you. And yet if you had gone away without seeking my advice, without embracing me, I would have been the only one who had not the right to reproach you.'

"For a few moments my mother became pensive again; she then seized my hand and asked:

" 'You love the vicomte, do you not?'

"I blushed.

" 'Oh, you can tell me everything,' she continued. 'You will not tell me anything I do not already partly know. You love, and though deserted by me and your father, you did not go away.'

"She clasped me to her arms and kissed my forehead.

"I felt her trembling lips murmur:

"'Thanks! Thanks!'

"'I did not go away,' I replied, 'because I must not and will not until I have first asked your advice. That is the answer I gave the vicomte, and he now awaits yours.'

"Without taking time to hear another word, my mother hurried toward the corridor. I hurried after her, but she was already in the room where I had left Don Jose, and he was reading the letter which I saw her put in her bosom when I entered the room.

"'You see,' she said, 'that I was already informed of the appeal you thought of making to Cyprienne, Don Jose, nevertheless I did not place any obstacle in your path.'

"At this moment I appeared in the brilliantly lighted doorway.

"'Both of you know, then, that I have given up my rights as a mother over you, Cyprienne. I have no orders to give you. Therefore I let you choose your own fate. Everything the vicomte said is true, and I guarantee his uprightness and honorableness. Yet I beg you not to follow him until you have heard me. What I have to say to you will probably alter your resolve.'

"Don Jose had read the letter to the end, and respectfully gave it back to my mother.

"'What shall I answer, madame?" he asked.

"'Tell her,' said my mother, 'tell her who sends you that she will be obeyed—Cyprienne's resolve will be taken to-morrow. Mine is already. As regards her—here she pointed with her finger at me—I want her to choose her way with a clear understanding. I must raise from her eyes the veil which covers my past and hers. The trial is painful, but necessary. Go, Don Jose, tell the sainted

woman who protects us that this painful work is only the prologue to the one which it will please her to still enjoin upon me.'

"I was so surprised at seeing my mother acquainted with the secret of my unknown protectors that I hardly saw the vicomte bow to us, and only when I heard the distant bang of the garden-door did I notice his disappearance.

"My mother looked thoughtfully at me. She took me by the hand and led me to her room.

" 'What I have to tell you is a very serious matter,' she said. 'Listen attentively, for you will become my confessor and my judge.'

"Without heeding my gesture of despair, she continued:

" 'I made a mistake, my child, and until now the whole force of it has fallen upon you. Through you I am punished. Through you I pay penance. Yet you must not judge me too severely. You love, and can therefore comprehend how far a weak, deserted, neglected woman can be carried away. Ah, Cyprienne, my story will be for you not only a painful confidential recital, but also a useful lesson.

" 'You, too, my child, I see on the point of taking that crooked path which can become so dangerous for noble souls like yours, which feel the need of love and pity. You are indeed my daughter, for just as we resemble each other in features I find a similarity between our characters which frightens me.

" 'Just like you, I too was brought up in solitude. As I had neither father nor mother any more, I was intrusted from my earliest youth to the care of my grandmother, the widowed Marquise de Simeuse.

" 'She still possessed the manners of the last century, as well as the selfishness peculiar to that generation; was egotistic and sceptical.

" 'Over eighty years of age, she gathered the dissatisfied of all parties in her parlor, and played with them *a la* Talleyrand.

" 'You can imagine that she did not have much time to think of me. Did she love me? I do not know. Sometimes I believed so; sometimes I doubted it strongly.

" ' "You have pretty eyes, my child," she would say; "you will be at least a duchess."

" 'My grandmother soon became tired of me. I grew very rapidly. I had large hands and terribly thin arms. My grandmother, who only loved what was handsome, could not conceal her dislike for me. She therefore sent me to a small farm in the neighborhood of Saint Etienne de Montluc.

" 'Her principal estates lay in that vicinity.

CHAPTER XXII

MARIE D'ALIGES

[*From the Blue Diary*]

"'OH! beloved farmhouse of Noizilles!' continued my mother. 'It was to me what the Convent of B—— was for you, my good Cyprienne. Ah, the five years I lived there are the only ones which, when I recall them to my memory, do not leave the shadow of mourning or the sorrow of remorse behind.

"'We lived there alone with my governess—an old, aristocratic spinster, who had earned her living in London, during the emigration, by teaching.

"'Her name was Mademoiselle de Saint-Lambert, but we called her Lambert for short.

"'We often had guests at Noizilles, and I enjoyed their company very much.

"'Besides, I had a comrade there—a playmate, a friend—the little Chevalier d'Aliges.

"'Marie—he was called Marie, like a girl—was about the same age as I, but slimmer and more childish looking. I can see him still, with his long, blond curls, and his merry, laughing eyes.

"'Behind his feminine appearance was concealed a manly little heart. Nothing frightened him. His gentle, blue eyes sometimes took on a magical, commanding ex-

pression. Their color then became almost dark, and they shot flames.

"'We spent the whole day together. My question, when I got up in the morning, was: "Where is Marie?" And at night, when we separated, we never said "*Adieu!*" or "*Au revoir!*" but always "To-morrow!"

"'He had no parents either, and lived on a small estate, about a quarter of an hour from Noizilles: it was his only legacy. The little Chevalier d'Aliges was therefore poorer than many a peasant; but this was all the same to us. Being both alone in the world, we thought it natural to love one another; and, as girls are bolder than boys, I called myself his "little wife."

"'This childish love did not frighten Lambert, she merely laughed at it.

"'As we grew up, Marie became more and more reserved. One day when we had a reception at Noizilles, he called me "mademoiselle." I saw that from now on a new element had entered our lives, and I wept all that night.

"'I resolved to ask Marie next morning whether he did not love me any more. But when he came I did not have the courage to do so.

"'He looked very sad, at least as sad as I did. He spoke without affectation of his poverty and my wealth. The time when a name was more than anything was over now, he said, and he must think of his future.

"'From that time on his visits to Noizilles became rarer. He only came every second day, then once a week, and later on more seldom still.

"'I understood very well the chevalier's reason, and loved him all the more for it.

"'It was about that time that my grandmother called me home and introduced me to the cream of Nantes society. My marriage with your father was already settled, and I was, perhaps, the only one who did not know of this project.

"'One evening the Count de Puysaie arrived. I was introduced to him. In less than twenty-four hours we were married. On the wedding-day the count went to England, where a diplomatic mission called him, and it was like a dream that I was now the Countess de Puysaie.

"'I was then fifteen years old, and was so small and weak that I did not look over thirteen.

"'At the bottom of my wedding-basket I found an enormous horn of sugar-plums.

"'Immediately after my marriage, my grandmother ceased to take me into society. She thought I ought not to be seen there except on the arm of my husband.

"'I did not love society, which was for the marquise the elixir of life.

"'"How lucky it was for you that you had me," she often said to me; "you will always remain a little eccentric, my poor Hortense, but now you are at least married."

"'I said I should like to return to Noizilles and await the return of my husband there. My grandmother raised no objection.

"'In this way I returned for a short time to my dear old country-seat and to Lambert. My poor little Marie d'Aliges paid us no more visits though. I only saw him on Sundays at church, and for a whole year he never crossed our threshold.

"'The noise of the outside world did not reach our lonely place easily. We learned of the Revolution which

had overthrown Charles X., and of the rebellion of the Duchess of Berry in the Vendée at the same time.

"'But a few months before the chevalier had disappeared, and no one knew what had become of him. I suspected that he had joined this adventurous undertaking either to deaden his sorrow or to get killed.

"'A woman's self-love is terrible. The thought I have just spoken of flattered mine, although it pained me at the same time.

"'In the daytime, at night, at every hour, and in every place, I thought of that handful of men who wandered about as exiles.

"'One evening my governess had gone on a visit to our neighbors, and I was alone in the house. I was thinking of them as I worked on my embroidery.

"'Suddenly I trembled in every limb. A cautious knock sounded at the window.

"'I was silent, and waited, while a peculiar fear contracted my heart.

"'The knocking was repeated louder than the first time, and a voice as faint as a sigh pronounced my name. I was not mistaken. The voice which called me was that of the Chevalier d'Aliges.

"'I hurried to the window, opened it wide, and saw underneath two distinct shadows, one of which moved violently.

"'"Say," I cried, "who is there?"

"'An unknown voice replied:

"'"Open quickly, he has fainted."

"'I hesitated no longer, as I was positive he referred to the chevalier.

"'A few minutes later the poor boy lay in the corner

of the fireplace, on the sofa on which old Lambert generally slept.

"'His companion, a proud, handsome young man, knelt beside him, opened the coat which covered a bleeding breast, and renewed its bandages.

"'I helped him, silent with fear, without thinking of asking what had brought them here.

"'Marie d'Aliges opened his eyes and saw me.

"'A faint, sorrowful smile played about his lips.

"'He then grasped my hand and that of his companion.

"'"These," he said, "are the two beings whom I love best in the whole world! Octave, this is Hortense, of whom I have often spoken to you; Hortense, this is the Count of Rancogne, my only, my best friend—"

"'"Good, good!" interrupted the Count of Rancogne; "now that we are at least safe for a few hours, we must think of the quiet you need."

"'In a few moments a bed was put up in a small room adjoining mine, and the chevalier laid down upon it.

"'While this was being done, the Count of Ranconge informed me of the events of the last few days.

"'The small band of the Duchess of Berry had been defeated at Burg-Neuf, the duchess herself had been captured at Nantes, and the insurrection was crushed.

"'The Count of Rancogne had to return to his home; but, before he left his friend, he wished to bring him to a safe place, and he did not doubt but what Marie had found such a one, at least for a time, at Noizilles.

"'Under such circumstances, hesitation is impossible. I was sure of my governess's silence.

"'I, therefore, gave the count the positive assurance

that Marie d'Aliges, so long as he was under my roof, need fear no danger.

" 'On the following morning the count continued his flight.

" 'Six long weeks Marie remained in Noizilles, and during these six weeks my old friend and I succeeded in keeping his presence a secret.

" 'During these six weeks he never spoke a word of love, and tried as little as possible to recall pictures of the past.

" 'Yet I recollect those six weeks as a long song of love.

" 'Even at this moment my soul lingers by this memory, on those joyful hours, with an emotion as innocent as our tenderness was.

" 'We had nothing to reproach ourselves with during those six weeks.

" 'The hour of separation was a cruel one, the more so since we both tried to appear only sad, while in reality we carried death in our souls.

" 'The chevalier asked of me, as an only favor, my portrait, a medallion, which I could not refuse him. This medallion hangs now around my neck and will not leave me even in death.

" 'The poor little chevalier!'

"My mother let her head fall on her bosom and paused for a while.

"She then continued:

" 'That was the last time I ever saw the chevalier. He had gone just at the right time. One week later my husband came to Noizilles, to take me back to Paris, where an influential position awaited him.

" 'He was very friendly and polite to me. He had the kindness to find me taller and handsomer.

" 'In a word, if he did not succeed in making me forget Marie, he at least pleased me better.

" 'Married against my will, I was nevertheless glad to have gotten such a gentle and agreeable husband.

" 'How many other poor girls are sacrificed to ugliness, stupidity and vice.

" 'Behind his frivolous exterior your father conceals a tender, loving heart. I soon perceived that he adored me, and I believed it would not be difficult for me to return his affection.

" 'The Chevalier d'Aliges had been in the life of my heart only an accident. I forgot him, or rather believed I had forgotten him, and thought with the utmost sincerity that I was really in love with my husband.

" 'Ah! Cyprienne, from your birth, which should have been a blessing, dates my unhappiness.

" 'In consequence of my unfortunate accident you were born two months too early.

" 'This otherwise natural circumstance bothered the fantasy of the count. He counted the time, informed himself about my life at Noizilles, and learned—from whom I do not know—of the secret stay with us of the Chevalier d'Aliges.

" 'He became bitter, almost insulting. Above all, he did not like you, Cyprienne.

" 'Your face reminded him, no doubt, of what he thought had been my misstep.

" 'A more experienced woman than I was would have found out the reason of this change of behavior

very soon. It would have brought about an explanation, through which her innocence would have been proved.

"'I did not have the courage to do this. The count only desired to be convinced of my innocence; I, however, avoided the opportunities he gave me to justify myself.

"'One day he went so far as to speak in a careless way of the Chevalier d'Aliges, who had recently died in Germany.

"'I became pale as death, and, in my uneasiness, was so foolish as to lie, by pretending not to remember such a person.

"'In this way the abyss between your father and me became wider every day. He had sent you meanwhile to B——.

"'As for me, he kept me in his house; but I was as distant from his love as you.

"'Even then a reconciliation might have been effected, had not an evil spirit entered our house.'

"A flash of lightning went through my brain.

"'Colonel Fritz, you mean?' I cried.

"My mother looked at me in surprise.

"'What?' she murmured. 'Have you already guessed it?

"'Your father did not know that he had received the most dangerous of all his enemies in his house.

"'He had, he said, known the Chevalier d'Aliges during his exile. He had been his last friend and consoler. Upon his deathbed he had received this medallion from him to return to me.

"'And this man, this monster, had the wickedness to

abuse the count's confidence, and take advantage of my weakness.

" 'And I—I, fool that I was, I believed him!'

"In this vein my mother went on, Ursula. Ah! dear martyr, whether you are guilty or not, I will not be your judge, and from your story nothing shall remain in my memory but your sorrows!"

CHAPTER XXIII

WHAT WOULD HAVE STOOD ON THE EMPTY LEAVES

JUST as Cyprienne only wished to remember her mother's sorrows, so shall we only speak of her remorse.

Guilty she was, though of folly and stupidity alone.

She had become not only the slave of a miserable scoundrel, but also of his affairs. He had accused her to her husband of a crime of which she was innocent, and which she could not defend.

She was forced to have her own legitimate daughter looked upon as the child of adultery, and the other one—the little Lila—to be taken away from its wicked father, who would have made a weapon out of her.

One being alone remained to her who loved and trusted her, and to this being, whom she had carried under her heart, who was flesh of her flesh and blood of her blood, she had just said:

"You love me, but you do yourself wrong, for I am the principal cause of all your sorrows. You have confidence in me, but you are deceived in me. I am weak and defenceless, and you call me to your aid, I who can only flee or defend myself. You honor me, pure soul, and I am the most guilty of women. Curse me now; I am the most wicked of mothers."

Was not this sufficient penance?

Yes, she had said all this to her gentle Cyprienne.

Cyprienne clasped her in her arms, kissed her forehead, and only murmured the words:

"Poor dear mother!"

. . . . . .

The pale gleam of the dawning day shines through the curtains.

Cyprienne is lying in her snow-white bed.

She sleeps, she dreams, and in her dreams she smiles.

Of what is the pretty child thinking?

She believes herself to be walking in the big garden at Noizilles on the arm of the little Chevalier d'Aliges. Suddenly the little chevalier becomes Don Jose, and the garden resembles the convent at B——.

Ursula is there too. She is somewhere in the bushes, has her finger on her mouth, and listens.

"Why are you weeping? Why do you doubt the future?" her companion asks her. "Have courage, have confidence in the unknown friends."

Suddenly the air is filled with flying forms.

They are all beings whom Cyprienne has loved, and by whom she was loved—the good lady superior, then Ursula, and then her mother.

The group comes nearer and surrounds Cyprienne. All lips open, all arms are stretched out to embrace her.

Finally the group stands aside, and the Countess of Monte-Cristo, leading Lila by the hand, walks up to her.

"Why do you weep? Why do you doubt the future?

Have confidence, Cyprienne, confidence in the unknown friends."

. . . . . .

The Countess de Puysaie is still awake. She has not gone to bed at all.

With reddened eyes and pale face she sat in an armchair buried in thought.

She, too, saw before her eyes the big garden of Noizilles and the pale face of the Chevalier d'Aliges.

She, too, passes in review all the persons who played a part in her life—the Marquise de Simeuse, the good old Lambert, the Count de Puysaie, and finally the cause of all her sorrows and tears, the tempter and tyrant, Colonel Fritz.

They all threaten and reproach her.

Only the little chevalier pardons. He weeps silently, like the angels of paradise weep, if a star becomes extinguished or a soul succumbs to temptation.

He alone pardons.

No, not he alone!

A vision purer and nobler than all rises above these pictures of despair. Her uplifted hand points toward heaven, and with the other hand she holds that of a child—Lila's.

"Weep, sinner! Bathe in the dew of your remorse! If you have wept, forgiveness will be extended to you!"

The Countess of Puysaie arose, took from a table a crumpled letter which she had been reading, and exclaimed:

"Yes, salvation is there, if not entire forgetfulness. Only she who has written this letter can make every-

thing good again—she, the saint, the consoler, the Countess of Monte-Cristo!'

As if the Countess de Puysaie had uttered a cabalistic mystery, she saw as she raised her eyes the Countess of Monte-Cristo standing in front of her.

Behind the half-opened door was Madame Postel.

"I could not come to you yesterday," said the Countess of Monte-Cristo. "A sacred duty which I have performed for years kept me back. Now I am free, and in consequence I am here. What have you thought of doing?"

"Placing my fate entirely in your hands," said the Countess de Puysaie. "You knew the extent of my misstep, but you are the only one who consoles me and refreshes my soul. Speak and tell me what I shall do."

"Good!" said the Countess of Monte-Cristo. "I have just spoken to Don Jose and expected this resolve. In the name of Almighty God, dear soul, I come to tell you: you have repented and suffered enough. Your sin has been washed out by your tears. Your remorse has devoured your crime, like the rust eats the iron. You have battled long enough with the storm, poor dismasted ship; you find the harbor. Sister, come with us."

And as the Countess of Puysaie, surprised and not comprehending, was silent, the Countess of Monte-Cristo continued.

"Come with us; you will find all your comrades in misfortune—the victims and the penitent ones; those who have suffered and those who have caused others to suffer. The gates open to the first as soon as they knock. The others, before they are permitted to enter, must undergo

a trial. You have gone through this trial, and I can at length let you share our tranquillity and the consolations of our work."

"What work?" stammered the countess.

Upon a sign from the Countess of Monte-Cristo, Madame Postel entered.

"Look at this lady!" continued the countess; "she has never swerved from the path of virtue. She is an unhappy wife, a still more unhappy mother, and her life has been a whole chain of sorrows. When I met her, not a hand had been stretched forth to assist her. Is that right? Is it not the duty of every Christian to console unmerited grief? The poor troubled hearts must be upheld and sustained."

The Countess of Monte-Cristo paused a moment, and then continued:

"To hunt up concealed sorrow, to console despair, is one of the works of the sisters. Their work is to prevent missteps, to warn young girls of the temptations which surround them. Unfortunately we are still very weak. But I have already met souls that are influenced by the best desires. A day will come when we shall all be strong through mutual love. These new missionaries, these new sisters of charity, these nurses of souls, will not turn from any misery, from any wretchedness. We shall leave to the men the proud work of civilization. Yes, my sisters, let us leave to them the trumpet tones of triumph, the intoxication of the battle, the pride of power. Modest assistants in the great work, we will fulfil our mission in the silence of obscurity."

The Countess of Monte-Cristo spoke, and the two sisters listened to her with bowed heads and clasped hands.

"Oh," sighed the Countess of Puysaie, "how can I ever be worthy of becoming an assistant of a saint like you?"

"You are so already, my dear," replied the Countess of Monte-Cristo, as she clasped the new sister in her arms; "yet you must undergo one more trial. You must retire from society for a time, perhaps for years. Others will watch faithfully over your daughter in your place. You do not make an orphan of her by deserting her."

"Command me," said the Countess of Puysaie, "and I will obey."

In the meanwhile the day had dawned, and in the Count of Puysaie's study a different scene took place.

The count, Baron Matifay, and Colonel Fritz were speaking about the marriage contract.

A mass of titles to property and other papers lay on the table. They were speaking about the value of this or that property, of the rental of this or that farm, and of the expected death of this or that relative.

Only of one person they did not think in making this inventory—Cyprienne.

The interview had ended, and they had come to an agreement.

Matifay placed the papers in a large portfolio with a silver lock, took his leave, and remarked that he would tell the lawyer personally about the basis of the contract.

The colonel rubbed his hands as he winked at the count, as if to say to him:

"Well, have we not entrapped him beautifully?"

"By the way," asked Matifay, as he turned around at the door once more, "when shall the signing take place?"

"As soon as possible," replied the Count de Puysaie. "To-morrow evening."

To-morrow evening! Poor Cyprienne!

CHAPTER XXIV

HAPPY THE RICH

ON THE following day the Puysaie mansion was brilliantly lighted up.

The lackeys wore their gala livery, the courtyard was filled with carriages.

New coaches continually rolled up, and the occupants —proud diplomats, young dandy *attachés*, old widows, young ladies with pointed shoulders—slowly ascended the ten steps of the porch.

While they walked majestically between the rows of lackeys a crowd had assembled outside in the street, who gave vent to their envy and their admiration by making all kinds of remarks.

"How happy are the rich!"

"That must be a marquis at least."

"An ambassador!"

"A minister!"

"See, that is the Duke of Lenoncourt!"

"Who? The little fat fellow?"

"No, the other one, the lean one. Although he looks so lean and hungry, he is nevertheless enormously rich. They say he spends five hundred francs a day."

"He could eat a whole ox every day for that."

"Yes, but he cannot eat more than enough."

"Certainly. Every meal two beefsteaks. No one can eat more than that, even if he is Emperor of China."

"Here comes a beautiful coach!"

"There's another one!"

"There must be a ball here to-night?"

"I think it's a wedding."

"No, no!"

"Yes!"

"Gentlemen, I think I can give you the best information about what is going on here to-night!" exclaimed a little lawyer's clerk. "The marriage contract between the daughter of the Count of Puysaie and Baron Matifay will be signed to-night. The baron is one of our clients."

A murmur of admiration ran through the crowd.

Matifay, the richest and most upright man in France. Matifay!

These three magical syllables awoke visions of iron safes, filled with shining gold pieces, of hundred-franc notes piled as high as a tower.

Some maintained that the banker carried in the lining of his left coat pocket a million five hundred thousand francs, and in his watch pocket a check for the same amount.

Another one said that Matifay had once refused to pay a high price for peaches in winter, but when the fruit girl gallantly cut one open for him, he paid twice the price.

Another one said that the baron had given a porter a portfolio to hold for a few minutes, and then jokingly asked him for seventy-five francs interest.

"How happy the bride must be!"

Ah! If they had only seen how pale Cyprienne was, and with what anxiety she awaited the dreaded hour. If they had only seen with what contempt and loathing the poor bride looked at her bridegroom.

The invited guests entered the grand drawing-room, where the Count de Puysaie awaited them.

He seemed to be uneasy, and from time to time glanced with visible impatience toward the door through which his wife was to enter.

She let them wait longer for her than etiquette allowed, and the aristocratic guests took notice of it.

The count had already sent twice after her. None of the servants came back, and the countess did not come either.

They waited no longer, though.

The lawyer opened his portfolio and arranged the necessary papers.

The count looked meaningly at Colonel Fritz, who understood the glance and immediately left the parlor.

Two minutes later he came back with a frown on his face, and whispered a few words in the count's ear.

The count made a gesture of affright, which did not pass unnoticed.

Yet he retained his wonderful self-possession, and said:

"The countess is ill, and begs to be excused for a few moments."

He then winked to Dr. Ozam, his physician, who stood near the fireplace, grasped his arm and went out with him.

As soon as he left the whispering began. They were afraid to talk aloud, for Cyprienne and Matifay were still there.

Entirely occupied with his love, the banker had not noticed the incident, and exhausted himself now in consolations to Cyprienne, who listened to him with pale cheeks and downcast eyes.

The marriage had caused a great many of the Count de Puysaie's immediate friends to become envious, and they began to make unfavorable remarks about the absence of the countess.

"The countess," said one, "is not a doll, and would not allow a slight illness to prevent her from appearing at such an important matter."

"Who knows how the matter stands?" murmured another. "I believe the countess did not approve of this marriage at the very beginning."

"It is a pity to sacrifice a young girl in this way," remarked a third person.

This third person, an old widow, led a twenty-five-year-old daughter on her arm, whom she would gladly have sacrificed in this way.

"It's nothing but a comedy," said an old man who belonged to another group; "the countess is no more sick than I am."

"But what is the reason she stays away?"

"The reason is simply because she refuses her consent. She is not on the best of terms with her husband, and is no doubt glad to embarrass him in this way."

"What, she refuses a son-in-law like Matifay! You are only joking, marquis. He only need wink, and every mother here would throw her daughter at his neck, and, should it be absolutely necessary, marry him herself too."

"I think you slander us, marquis!" said a lady.

"God forbid! I am only speaking of those who have marriageable daughters. Yours is not old enough yet."

"Oh, my Lucile is six years already."

"Let us rather say fifteen," murmured the old sceptic. "Let us speak of something else."

In the meantime the Count de Puysaie and Dr. Ozam had ascended the stairs which led to the countess's apartment, and the doctor, who was acquainted with the location, had already placed his hand on the door-knob.

The count held him back.

"Doctor," he said, "you are an honest man, are you not?"

The doctor raised his white head, looked at the count with his big, light-blue eyes, and said:

"I believe so."

"Would you be able to keep a secret which concerns the honor and happiness of a whole family?"

"I have been told hundreds of such secrets in my life," replied the doctor, "but I do not know how it happens—I forget all of them."

"That does not satisfy me," continued the count. "Will you make yourself the accomplice of a lie?"

The physician knitted his bushy eyebrows.

"Oh, it is a perfectly innocent lie; a lie, though, which alone can place me in a position to do what I have just said—save the honor and happiness of a family."

"I must be master of my own will," said Dr. Ozam. "I can promise you nothing now but silence, whether I agree to assist you or not."

"Well, then, look here!" exclaimed the count, as he threw the door wide open.

The countess's room was empty; the bed looked as if a person had rested on it for a few hours.

A closet stood open and was also empty. A few dresses lay forgotten on the chair.

"Well?" asked the doctor, as he looked at the count.

"Well," replied the latter, "do you not see that she has gone off? What a scandal! Yes, she has escaped, doctor! I thought I had conquered her at last. She appeared to agree to everything, and now she plays me this trick!"

He took a crumpled piece of paper out of his breast-pocket and handed it to the doctor, saying:

"Look here! She writes that!"

"Count," the doctor read, "I am too weak to resist your threats. Yet I am too strong to agree to sacrifice our child to build up your fallen fortunes."

"Our child!" repeated the count, bitterly.

"As I did not dare to say no openly," the doctor continued to read, "I have decided to run away, so as not to be obliged to give my consent. Do not look for me; all search would be useless."

"We shall see," cried the count.

"You will not see me again until the day you give up your plans with respect to Cyprienne. Oh, for the last time, I tell you, my friend, I have deceived you, but do not let my mistake be expiated by an innocent person. Cyprienne, I swear it to you, Cyprienne is your daughter!"

The count sank into a chair.

"What shall I do now?" he stammered. "How shall I explain this flight?"

"Well," replied Dr. Ozam, smiling, "you have only

to extend the excuse you so happily imagined. No one has been in this room yet, has there?"

"No; no one but me and Colonel Fritz. I am sure of that friend."

"Ah, so!" said the doctor; "then there is nothing to do but to win time. The Countess de Puysaie is very ill; I will confirm that, and visit her two or three times a day. At the end of a few days we shall send her to the sea-shore if it is necessary."

"That would not help long," cried the count. "You know the world has eyes which pierce walls, and ears which hear everything. Before a fortnight has passed our secret will be cried from the housetops."

"Of course," replied the doctor, coolly, "we must discover the whereabout of the countess before the fortnight has passed."

"But how and where? With the help of the police?"

"No, not of the police."

"But what other means is there?"

"It is stated in this letter. Give up the marriage of your daughter."

"Never!" exclaimed the count, angrily.

"Do as you please," continued the doctor; "in the meanwhile, I tell you—I, who know Monsieur Matifay, for I have treated his adopted daughter—again: give up all thought of this marriage."

"Do you perhaps know—"

The physician interrupted the count, and said:

"I know nothing, for all secrets intrusted to me I forget. Reflect upon the matter, count. I will take upon myself the responsibility of sending your guests away."

Five minutes later the last carriage rolled out of the

courtyard, and the count found himself alone in his mansion with a whole crowd of servants.

Alone, entirely alone, for he was convinced that Cyprienne was not his daughter.

As for Cyprienne, who had been told that her mother was seized with an infectious disease, she looked upon the marriage as being merely postponed, but not broken off. Thus this magnificent mansion, apparently so cheerful from the outside, hid nothing but misery, ruin and despair.

Happy the rich!

CHAPTER XXV

THE CAFÉ TO THE BLUE SASH

TWO billiard-tables stood on the first floor of the café of which we speak. Every night, between nine and eleven, a small number of rich men assembled here, and amused themselves playing cards, while, on the ground floor, porters, messengers, and other people generally came in about the time the guests upstairs went home.

The ground floor was, therefore, not as elegantly furnished as the first story, but consisted of a small, narrow room with a bar at the back.

At the moment we enter the place, five or six porters are emptying their glasses in company.

Our friends, Joseph and Clement, stood in front of the bar and drank their Johannisberger, and only a single group would have aroused the attention of the lover of the picturesque.

This group consisted of Jacquemin and Cinella.

Jacquemin looked in his glass, and Cinella, seated opposite him, scratched his red nose.

Legigant had just left them, and they were thinking of the promise they had given him.

In spite of their intoxication, a certain feeling of remorse stirred their feelings.

The black deed they had consented to perform was repulsive to both of them.

Cinella had his hands in his pockets, and played with the gold pieces which the tempter had given him in advance, and repeated like a refrain the last words he had spoken:

"I will be able to buy poor Pippiona a few delicacies."

Was this an excuse for his treachery?

What! Ursula had been the guardian angel of his daughter many weeks, had nursed her, repaired her torn clothes, and now he was going to lend his aid to a criminal abduction, for Legigant's explanation had not convinced him, and he knew that it was a question of abduction.

What did Jacquemin, on his side, see at the bottom of his glass? His former happy life was gone, and with frightened look he measured the abyss he had leaped over with such lightning-like rapidity.

Jacquemin knew very well that Legigant contemplated some crime.

So much the better then! He would let some one suffer too. As he could not revenge himself on her whom he had lost, he would satisfy his hate on another, and torture her the way he had been tortured.

"It must be thus!" he said to himself. "She may cry: I have cried myself; she may become bad and wicked, since she whom I loved so dearly became bad and wicked too. If I have become what I am, it is her fault."

And with these words, he took his glass and tried to drink out of it, although it was already empty.

The phantom of Nini Moustache was not the only one which pursued him; there was a second one.

Celine had been his evil genius, and his unfortunate passion for her had ruined him.

The other one, on the contrary, pointed with outstretched hand to a way which was, perhaps, longer and more fatiguing, but which in the end would lead to salvation.

And amid the deafening hum of intoxication, a gentle voice whispered in his ear:

"Come with us, my brother! Forget your love. Look for your salvation in patience and work. Busy hands make a clear mind, calm nights follow the laborious days of the shop, and sleep is the consoling companion of a good conscience. You think you can forget in drink, poor fool, but you only increase in that way the number of your bitter recollections."

This form had appeared to him at all serious hours of his life, and had let him hear her warning voice; and now, too, he hoped that this good genius would appear to him again.

Unfortunately this did not seem to be the case.

Continually deceived by promises, which were broken the next day, the guardian angel had probably given up forever the ungrateful task.

And as Jacquemin raised his glass in his heavy hand, he exclaimed:

"So much the better! Let them leave me to my fate; I am a scoundrel anyway."

He had reached that stage of intoxication where the body is helpless and succumbs to the force of sleep.

His heavy head sank on the table.

Cinella shook him in vain to waken him, and whispered in his ear without getting an answer.

"Well," said the Italian at length, as he staggered to his feet, "we still have time until midnight. He can sleep here, and I can count on his not stirring from the place. In the meantime I will make all preparations there. What must I do first?"

He put his hand to his head and murmured:

"I must induce the pretty neighbor to come to Pippiona. She is really pretty; there is no mistake about that."

He smiled as he said this. Suddenly he became grave again.

"Ah, what of it!" he added, after a pause, and snapping his fingers; "I can provide poor Pippiona with some delicacies."

He left the saloon murmuring these words to himself.

A waiter came into the "cellar" to light the gas.

A firm, muscular hand was placed on Louis's shoulder, and, looking up, he saw Joseph in front of him.

Yes, it was Joseph Rozel who stood there in front of Jacquemin; it was the adviser and consoler, whom the unhappy wretch had so long called for in the tortures of his doubts.

"Brother," said Joseph, "you promised me but a few days ago not to drink any more, and to return to Clement's. Yet I meet you again in the tavern; that is not right. You know what I promised to do for you if you kept straight."

"Yes," murmured Louis, "you wanted to give my mother back to me—my poor mother, whom I forced to

leave me. Ah, Joseph, it is a pity you trouble yourself to save me. I am a good-for-nothing; I am lost, lost!"

A big tear rolled down his cheeks.

Joseph pointed to the tear.

"If you can still cry," he said, "you are not lost."

"Ah, if you only knew!" exclaimed Louis.

Joseph smiled.

"You have already found out yourself that I know everything," he said; "at least, everything that concerns you."

"That is true," murmured Jacquemin; "but I have since become a scoundrel, and if I were to make you new promises, I would not keep them either. There is nothing left here!"

As he said this, he struck his breast with his hand.

"We shall soon put something there again," said Joseph, as if speaking to himself.

He then spoke aloud:

"If I ask you now to assist me in an undertaking—an abduction, for instance—would you do it?"

Louis looked at Joseph in surprise.

He had never expected to receive such a proposition from Joseph.

The word "*abduction*," however, explained the mystery to him.

Joseph must no doubt know of the promise which Louis had given Legigant, and his proposition had no other purpose than to make him blush for the promise he had given.

"Ah, you know all!" he exclaimed.

It was Joseph's turn to be surprised.

"Very probably," he replied, with apparent under-

standing; "let us speak, though, of our matter. The young girl is named Ursula Durand. She lives not far from here, in the Rue Rambuteau, by the Gosses."

These details convinced Louis more and more that Joseph knew of his dastardly promise. He seized his friend's hand, and sobbingly exclaimed:

"Mercy! Mercy! Yes, I promised to do it! I was drunk and out of my senses! But I swear to you—I swear to you, I will not do it."

"You have promised?" asked Joseph, curiously.

"Yes," continued Jacquemin, "the poor girl is to be abducted to-night; she is to be brought to Cinella, whose daughter she nurses."

"Pippiona!" murmured Joseph.

"I see that you know all. But you came at the right time. I now see the wickedness of my promise, and I swear to you that I shall foil the plan."

Joseph became thoughtful.

"Legigant got ahead of me," he said to himself; "I have really come at the right time."

Then turning to Jacquemin, he said:

"Tell me word for word how the abduction was planned."

"They want the young girl to spend the night with Pippiona. I should be at midnight at the street door. A few feet away will be a hack; Cinella will bring the girl, who will be dragged to me. My part in the plan then begins. I am to carry the girl to the coach, but where the place is to which I am to bring her I do not know. It is my firm resolve, however, not to follow my instructions."

"On the contrary," said Joseph, "you will follow them."

"What?" cried Jacquemin in astonishment.

"Yes, you will follow them," continued Joseph, "with the exception of the coach. Where is it going to stop?"

"On the corner of the place. Carriages generally stand there in front of the restaurants."

"Good. Then another coach will stand in a contrary direction a few feet from the house. As soon as the young girl is in your power, the coach will approach and the driver will say to you: 'Cab, sir!'"

"And then?" asked Jacquemin.

"You are to get into the coach."

"I shall obey you," replied Jacquemin.

Clement, in the meanwhile, still stood in the other room of the saloon, and had ordered a second glass of Johannisberger.

"It was the highest time!" said Joseph, when he returned to him; "it would have been too late to-morrow."

"Then the thing will be carried out to-night?" asked Clement.

"Yes, at midnight. We must get a coach now and a driver."

"You can get the coach, I will look out for the driver; in fact, I will be the driver myself."

"Well, then, until—midnight."

"Yes—until midnight."

CHAPTER XXVI

MONSIEUR AND MADAME GOSSE

MONSIEUR and Madame Gosse, Ursula's protectors, lived on the fourth floor of the house in the Rue Rambuteau. Above their dwelling were a few attics, tenanted by the Punch and Judy performer Cinella and our friend Joseph.

Monsieur Gosse, whose blue frock, gray hat, and thick cane were known to all the street boys, stayed the whole day in the shop he kept in the Point Saint Eustache.

His wife, who had formerly been a midwife, had retired from business.

She lived upon her income now, and took life easy.

"For a weak stomach," the good woman used to say, "there is nothing like a good glass of liquor."

The Lord only knows how many times a day she found it necessary to strengthen her weak stomach in this way.

Where did the money come from?

The neighbors, who were envious, whispered something about a well-dressed gentleman who visited her in the absence of Monsieur Gosse at his office.

We need not say that this was a base slander. Madame Gosse's virtue was above reproach; her only weakness was a liking for a good glass of Curaçoa or Maraschino, and

if Legigant visited her without her husband's knowledge, he came to talk business.

But what kind of business could Madame Gosse have with Monsieur Legigant?

The neighbors remembered that his first visits occurred about the time Madame Gosse had given up her profession.

She had been absent a few months, and when she returned she had brought a beautiful little doll, all wrapped up, with her.

She told a mysterious story about this doll.

She said it was the child of an aristocratic lady, who had commissioned her to bring it up, and she would later on become very rich through the child.

The neighbors pretended to believe this; but as Legigant's visits became regular, they thought they had a right to laugh when Monsieur Gosse passed by.

Suddenly, however, the child, after it had grown up, disappeared just as mysteriously as it had come, and the visitor in the brown coat likewise.

Later on, after the lapse of a few years, the unknown gentleman had been seen again. Madame Gosse had made another journey and brought back Ursula with her, and since that time Monsieur Legigant had not allowed a day to pass without paying her a visit.

But as Madame Gosse had become old since then, the kind neighbors came to the conclusion that the visits were no longer meant for her, but for Ursula.

About the same hour that Joseph's interview with Louis Jacquemin took place, Madame Gosse's good friends were in a great state of excitement.

On the stairs, in the corridor, in front of the street door, groups had formed.

Something unknown in the annals of the house had happened.

The gentleman in the brown coat had gone up to see Madame Gosse at a different hour than usual, and the "dear little man" would, when he came from his office, very probably come in contact with him.

What would the little man say then?

And what would the man in the brown coat do?

The curiosity and excitement reached their climax when Monsieur Gosse himself, as regular as a clock, ascended the stairs and went to his apartments.

Think of it, a drama was on the tapis which did not cost a cent! This Madame Gosse, who thought so much of herself, was about to be caught *in flagrante delicto!* Five, ten minutes passed and not a sound was heard. The scandal-mongers were silent and listened with outstretched necks and ears standing up, but in vain. At length a door opened, a heavy step was heard on the stairs, and the noise of a cane sounded on the steps.

There was no longer any doubt. It was Monsieur Gosse who came down, and, moreover, all alone.

The disappointed curiosity turned to anger. What was the use of taking an interest in such a nincompoop of a husband? He only got what he deserved.

Without paying the sightest attention to the mutterings of his neighbors, Monsieur Gosse strode through the crowd with undisturbed coolness, turned a corner and entered a neighboring café where he even spent some money.

When the little boy, who had been sent after him, returned and told this, the news was received in dumb surprise.

We shall leave these neighbors to themselves and ascend the four flights leading to Madame Gosse's apartments.

Here we see the former midwife and our old friend Legigant sitting opposite each other.

The conversation they are having is, without doubt, a very important one, for though they are both alone, they speak in low tones, and Madame Gosse had at the very outset of the interview locked the front door.

Legigant speaks calmly, like a man sure of his affairs.

At this moment the neighbors espy the return of Monsieur Gosse, and await a quarrel and a scandal.

Monsieur Gosse goes up the stairs. Arrived at the door he rings timidly.

"That is my husband!" says the former midwife.

Legigant does not move a muscle, but merely says:

"You know very well, Madame Gosse, that both in your interest and mine your husband must know nothing of our secrets."

"The good lamb!" said Madame Gosse, "what good could our secrets do him?"

She opened the door a little, put out her head and said:

"I am busy, my dear husband. Come back in an hour. Here is half a franc—go and drink a cup of coffee."

And thus it came about that the dear little fellow, for the first time in his life, went to a café and spent some money there!

CHAPTER XXVII

MADAME GOSSE'S HESITATION

THE neighbors were right when they surmised that the little fortune Madame Gosse possessed came from Monsieur Legigant.

The former midwife was one of those marionettes whom that terrible schemer made dance at will.

The interview between Colonel Fritz, Dr. Toinon, and Legigant, in the office in the Rue Faubourg Montmartre, has already made us acquainted with the *rôle* Madame Gosse was to play in the dark plot of the three accomplices.

She had been at first commissioned to secretly bring up the little Lila, and when the time came to judicially establish her identity, they counted on her to do it.

As daughter of the Countess de Puysaie, and born during wedlock, Lila naturally became the sole heiress of Count Loredan and her elder sister, Cyprienne.

Madame Gosse was not a bad woman at heart, but if she could make a penny easily she did not hesitate to do so.

What evil had she done, anyway, in bringing up Lila and receiving the secret visits of her mother?

None at all!

She had rescued the life of a little creature, and preserved it from the foundling asylum, or a worse fate.

She had consoled a poor, despairing woman, and—what was still better—had earned a neat little income through her humanitarianism.

To-day Ursula, and not Lila, was in question.

Monsieur Legigant did not seem to grow tired doing good. Ursula, he said, was threatened by a great danger, and she should not feel alarmed if she did not see her on the following day. It would be good if she spread the rumor that the young girl had gone travelling. Of course, only for a few days.

Ursula could have gone to see the good nuns who had brought her up.

This time Madame Gosse hesitated to carry out Legigant's plans.

The first time Legigant had come to her and said:

"It is a question of bringing up the child of an aristocratic lady who would be ruined by an indiscretion. You will therefore earn a nice sum of money, and at the same time do a service for an influential family which they will never forget."

And Madame Gosse had consented to the proposition.

When he had come the second time, he had said:

"Do you want to be the mother and protectress of a poor deserted girl? Do you want to look upon her as your own daughter?"

This time, too, Madame Gosse said yes.

But what did Legigant ask of her now when she knew Ursula, and when she had become used to the dear gentle child?

And what did he want to make of her?

Certainly not something good.

The little income, the good liquors, and other such things were very tempting; but it was hard to betray a poor young thing who had nobody in the world!

Legigant impatiently rubbed his hands. He only had a few hours to spare, and began to doubt his ability to conquer Madame Gosse's repugnance.

"Well, make up your mind, my dear Madame Gosse," said Legigant.

"I cannot! I don't want to have anything more to do with such secret stories. In the first place my husband is not satisfied. Yesterday he said to me, 'Dear Bebelle'—that's what the little fellow calls me—'we ought not to have anything to do with such mysterious things.'

"I assure you, Madame Gosse, that there is nothing mysterious about it. Who intrusted Ursula to your care, anyway?"

"You, sir; I do not deny that. But you see the little one likes it here. My husband loves her, and I would rather chop off my hand than harm her. Not that I distrust you. But such an abduction at night looks rather suspicious, to say the least. And what shall I say if the lady for whom she is working comes and asks for her? That she has gone to her folks? I could not say that, because she probably told them that she had no one in the world except us. No, no, I tell you it is impossible."

"Yet it must be," replied Legigant, arising from his chair and walking up and down the room. "What would you say, my dear Madame Gosse, if I proposed to you to have Ursula spend a few days in the suburbs of Paris? A few days, that is all. If you are with her yourself, you

will be convinced that nothing harmful will happen to her with you."

"Well, of course," replied Madame Gosse, beginning to hesitate. "If I could accompany Ursula, that would be a different matter. But do you think she will go voluntarily?"

"That is why she must be abducted!" exclaimed Legigant. "She would tell her fellow working girls where she was going to, and thus her whereabout would be discovered, and everything be lost. She must disappear. Do you understand me? That you disappear at the same time she does makes no difference; it is only necessary that she should not be here to-morrow, and that no one should know what has become of her."

"Well, all right, then!" exclaimed Madame Gosse, as she drained a last glass; "either you abduct us both or neither of us. That is my last word."

"And the last word is the best," said Legigant. "It is all right as it is. You know too much already, while monsieur could not reveal anything."

"No, and the reason for it is that the dear little fellow knows nothing," replied the former midwife.

CHAPTER XXVIII

PIPPIONA AND MISTIGRIS

IT IS about nine o'clock at night. Pippiona is sleeping in her little bed. She lies in an uneasy, feverish sleep. Her husky breathing painfully swells the lean, flat bosom.

She sleeps, and no one watches over her sleep. No one but Mistigris, the poor black cat.

The latter is the eternal and resigned victim of Punchinello, as Pippiona is the eternal victim of her padrone.

Therefore a tender friendship has been formed between these two creatures, the cat and the girl.

Poor Mistigris! Poor Pippiona!

She moves under her thin covering. A racking cough tears her breast, she opens her eyes and sees the yellow eyes of the cat gleaming at her.

"Mistigris!" she says. "Come here, Mistigris!"

Mistigris springs on the bed and rubs against his little mistress.

Poor Pippiona! Poor Mistigris!

They understood each other, I say. Ah, how often have they exchanged melancholy glances in wind and snow when Pippiona held out her tin plate in vain in her blue fingers, while the cat patiently received the blows Punchinello gave her with his whip.

And how the street boys laughed! How they laughed over Pippiona and over Mistigris!

Poor Mistigris! Poor Pippiona!

"Mistigris! Come here, Mistigris!"

The cat and the child play together. The former springs about the cover and the little one laughs at him.

Poor Pippiona! Poor Mistigris!

Now she shivers and shudders. That is the fever. She presses the smart animal to her breast and it remains motionless so as to warm her.

She speaks softly to him.

What does she say?

"Do you still remember our happy days in those splendid poor villages, where the people were so good? You were applauded, the good ladies caressed your back, and the children divided their cake with you. Old gentlemen chucked me under the chin, and exclaimed: 'That is a pretty child!' Friendly ladies kissed me on the forehead, and pressed money in my hand. Ah, those were good people, and that was a nice time, my poor Mistigris!"

Mistigris seemed to understand, for he rubbed himself on Pippiona's arms, and his loud purring seemed to repeat:

"Yes, that was a nice time!"

"At that time," continued Pippiona, "Papa Cinella was not rough. All the good things were for me and you got your share too. Ah, that nice time; that happy time!"

And Mistigris seemed to repeat, purring in melancholy tones:

"Ah, that nice time; that happy time!"

"Here," continued Pippiona, "it is cold, and the people are bad. There is no good milk here in which you can dip your long beard, and no rye bread which smells like nut oil. Ah, these terrible long dirty streets in which we must wander about. Ah, this ugly country! This ugly country! My poor Mistigris."

And the cat mewed, and appeared to be saying:

"This ugly country!"

"Listen, Mistigris," continued Pippiona, lowering her voice, "to the beautiful dream I had the other evening. I dreamed I was rich and lay in a big silk bed. On the cover, on the floor, everywhere, in fact, stood beautiful play-toys, and you, too, my poor Mistigris, were there, right close to me. Your black hair shone, around your neck was a red ribbon, and I held you in my arms, and we both fell asleep, and I was so happy—yes, so happy!"

Ah! they loved each other very much, Pippiona and her Mistigris.

It was her only play-toy and her only friend, the only confidant of her griefs and her hunger.

Pippiona has fallen asleep now, and Mistigris curls himself in her arms.

Suddenly a fresh, clear young voice is heard outside, a light step comes up the stairs, the door opens, and Ursula enters.

In one hand she carries a warming apparatus, and in the other a cup of good hot milk.

She strikes the match against the wall, and lights the lamp.

"Well, my little child," she says, "how did you pass

the day? Drink this milk first. Not so eagerly. Do you like it? So, now you have enough, we shall give the rest to Mistigris. B-r-r! it is fearfully cold here. I will make the fire right away."

And, talking in this way, Ursula hastily goes here and there, while Pippiona, clasping her hands, follows her with her eyes, as if she were a goddess.

Mistigris springs here and there, and rubs his nose against the dress of the pretty sister of charity.

Ursula sees how poor Pippiona becomes paler than she was. Her frightened eyes gaze toward the door and she stammers:

"There he is."

A heavy, staggering footstep makes the old stairs tremble.

It was the master of the apartment, Signor Cinella, who was coming home.

"He is drunk!" murmured Pippiona, trembling in every limb. "He will beat me!"

"No, no!" said Ursula, "do not tremble that way; he will not beat you. I will not leave you so long as he stays here."

Cinella entered.

He was not alone.

A gentleman in a blue frock with gold buttons, pearl-gray trousers, and with a cane in his hand accompanied him.

It was our old friend, Dr. Toinon.

"That's the invalid, isn't she?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Cinella.

He was terribly befogged; he had drunk to get courage.

"Good, good," said the physician, "we shall soon see how the matter stands."

He approached the bed beside which stood Ursula, who was astonished to see this new face here.

"Dr. Ozam," said Toinon, "cannot come either this evening or to-morrow evening. He therefore sends me."

This explanation sounded perfectly straight, and Ursula, bowing, stepped aside.

The spectacle which now took place was a heart-rending one.

They had the poor emaciated body of the invalid bared, and one could now see the bosom shiver and contract with the icy air.

The doctor finished his examination without saying a word, only shaking his head from time to time.

Cinella had let his chin drop on his breast. He slept standing.

The doctor finally permitted Pippiona to dress herself again, and said, in the careless tone which physicians assume in such cases, that it was nothing, absolutely nothing.

He then took Ursula aside, and asked:

"You are the nurse, no doubt?"

"No," replied Ursula; "these poor people cannot afford to have a nurse, doctor. But should one be necessary, I will be happy to act as such."

"A nurse is absolutely necessary here," replied the doctor, "and we shall get one for the poor little thing to-morrow. To-night certainly—"

"To-night," interrupted Ursula, "I will watch by her."

"Very good, my child," replied Dr. Toinon. "I have

some other patients to visit now! You need not go to the drug store. I will order the necessary things as I go past, and they will be brought to you."

"I wish you would notify my parents," said Ursula.

"With pleasure. What's their name?"

"Gosse, doctor. Madame Gosse."

"Good, good. I shall tell Madame Gosse to send up your supper. *Au revoir*, my handsome little nurse.

"Hey, there, Cinella, old beer cask! Light me down the stairs, and don't sleep!"

And the doctor left the house.

Cinella went with him under the pretence of going to the drug store to get the necessary medicines.

He was not seen any more that night, and the apothecary's boy brought the medicines.

"Here," said Ursula to Pippiona, after she had arranged the room in order, "take this spoonful of medicine and go to sleep! You must obey me or I shall scold you. Just look at Mistigris, he is not sick, but sleeps any way!"

"How good you are, Ursula!" sighed Pippiona.

"Yes, yes, I know what you want. You want to make me compliments so that I'll let you talk and not have you go to sleep! But this time it will not succeed. In an hour you must take another dose, and then we can talk a little again. Now, then, close your eyes and go to sleep!"

Pippiona shut her eyes, but not entirely, stealing from under her long silken eyelashes stealthy glances at Ursula.

The latter in the meanwhile had taken Mistigris upon her lap, and was cutting up some bread and meat for his supper.

She did not suspect that, besides her patient, some one else observed her at this occupation.

Outside in the corridor, close to the door, Cinella stood and peered through the keyhole.

This time they had not heard him come up the stairs, for he had taken off his shoes so as not to make any noise.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE TWO COACHES

HALF-PAST eleven o'clock rings from the church steeple of St. Eustache.

A one-horse carriage rolls up to the corner of the Rue Rambuteau, a little below the café to the "blue sash," and stops there.

Legigant gets out, and the driver follows him to the street. They both speak in low voices. Legigant, no doubt, gives instructions, for the other man listens attentively, and nods his head in token of assent.

Then the driver gets on his box again, and Legigant walks a few steps in the direction of the café.

He only glances through the door, and looks around the interior of the establishment.

Madame Gosse has evidently been waiting for this signal, for she answers Legigant with a nod of the head.

The lady is dressed for a journey, and carries a packed satchel in her hand; she is taking leave of her dear little husband.

In the meantime, a different scene is being enacted at the corner of the Rue Rambuteau and the Rue St. Denis.

A dark-colored coach has stopped there, and the

coachman gets off from his box and speaks softly, too, to his passenger.

The latter, who wears the gray jumper of a workingman, points with his finger to the window of an attic, a few houses further below, on the other side of the street.

"I shall go inside," he said, "and find out what is going on in the house. From the room I have there I can observe everything that occurs in Cinella's apartments. As soon as the moment comes the window will be lighted up."

"And then," replied the coachman, who was none other than Clement, "I will ride down the street and cry to Jacquemin: 'Cab, sir?' "

"Yes, and then you will ride as fast as possible to the place I told you of."

"All right."

"Now I shall see if Jacquemin is at his post."

Joseph left Clement and crossed the street in the direction of the market.

A black form which leaned against the wall of a house stepped toward him.

"Is that you, Louis?"

"Yes, Joseph."

"Then pay attention! The moment is at hand."

After saying this, Joseph went to his apartments.

Just immediately behind him was a man who staggered here and there from the combined effects of drink and excitement.

It was Signor Cinella.

In the café Monsieur and Madame Gosse took leave of each other.

"Then you know what I told you," repeated Madame Gosse for the tenth time; "if I am called for what will you say?"

"I shall say that you are in the country."

"With whom?"

"With our niece, Ursula."

"And when shall we come back?"

"In about a week or ten days."

"That's right. From time to time, every two or three days you will speak about us, as if you had received a letter."

With these words Madame Gosse arose and went into the street.

The coach was still at the same place.

With slow steps she went toward it.

"You are waiting for me, are you not?" she asked.

The coachman immediately pulled open the door, Madame Gosse waved good-by to her husband, got in and leaned back in the darkest corner.

At this moment from the steeple of St. Eustache rang a quarter of twelve.

CHAPTER XXX

POOR MISTIGRIS!

LET us return to Pippiona's attic. The scene has entirely changed. Ursula sits on her chair, with her hand resting on the table, and is sleeping profoundly. Pippiona is asleep, too, and only Mistigris watches in the darkness and silence.

Suddenly the light flickers, and a draught of air comes in as if the door had been opened. Then the candle goes out entirely.

Mistigris springs from the bed, and nothing else can be seen in the darkness but his yellow eyes, which gleam like fire-balls.

A slight noise, as if made by the cautious step of a murderer or a thief, is heard.

A chair falls to the ground with a crash.

Pippiona has awakened.

She is afraid.

Ursula heaves a long, painfully drawn sigh.

"Who is there?" asks Pippiona.

There was no answer.

"Who is there? who is there?" asks Pippiona again; and, springing from her bed, she calls, in a loud voice: "Help! help!"

Suddenly she feels herself seized around the throat by an iron fist.

"Will you keep quiet, confound you?" said a trembling voice.

It was the voice of Signor Cinella.

The little one keeps up her cry of "Help! help!"

Suddenly Cinella, in his turn, utters a cry of rage and fear, his hand leaves go of Pippiona's neck, and the invalid sinks in a faint on the bed.

Mistigris has come to his young mistress's help, and courageously sprung upon Cinella's back. He scratches his cheeks and shoulders with his long claws, and bites his neck with his sharp teeth.

Cinella tries in vain to shake off his enemy, and turns about in the narrow attic like a wild animal in its cage.

At length he utters a cry of triumph.

He has clutched the animal by the back, tears it from his shoulders, and, holding it high in the air, dashes it angrily on the stone floor of the room.

The cat, which has every rib in its body broken, mews plaintively, and Cinella, half crazed with pain, raises his heel and crushes out its brains.

He then wipes his hands and face with a cloth, and taking Ursula in his arms, makes a motion to carry her downstairs.

The attic room on the other side of the staircase is, in the meanwhile, though dark, not empty.

At the partly opened door stands a man.

As soon as Cinella has gone down a few steps, the door is thrown wide open, a head is bent curiously over the banisters and two gleaming eyes try to penetrate the darkness.

"It is he!" he says to himself.

In this way a few minutes pass.

The spy raises himself upright again.

"He is now in the hallway," he says to himself; "now it is time."

He returns to his attic, lights a candle, and moves it here and there a few times, afterward extinguishing it again.

He then climbs on top of a table, and looks through the window into the street.

He sees a carriage roll off in the direction of the quays.

Madame Gosse, too, went to sleep in her coach.

It is twelve o'clock. That is the hour mentioned to the coachman.

He knows that another person, a sick young girl, as he was told, should get in; he knows also that he must drive off at twelve punctually and the young girl does not come.

"Ah, what," said the coachman to himself, "perhaps they have changed their minds. I will drive the old lady off."

So saying, he applied the lash to his horse and rode rapidly off in the direction of the Rue Montmartre.

It is about a quarter past twelve. Madame Gosse snores in the coach, and dreams her little husband is on his knees at her feet imploring her not to go.

In the rear of the cellar of the "Blue Sash," at the same table where we saw Louis Jacquemin and Legigant sitting together a few hours before, Cinella is now seated alone.

In his intoxication Cinella only remembers that he was

terribly angry, that he had clutched some one's neck, and that he had silenced a cry for help.

Was Pippiona dead? Ah, he had clutched her so forcibly and she was so weak!

To put an end to his doubts he would have had to return to his home, but the wretch did not dare to do that.

CHAPTER XXXI

POOR PIPPIONA!

THE house in the Rue Rambuteau is dark and silent now.

No, not entirely dark, for there is a light still burning in one of the attic rooms.

The lighted room is Joseph's.

There is not a trace of the luxury to be seen in his palatial residence in the Chaussee d'Antin.

Nothing can be seen here but a simple iron bedstead, a long box of plain wood, and a leather belt, the only souvenir of Biasson remaining to him, which hangs on a nail.

"Ah, Joseph!" he murmurs to himself, "now you are rich and powerful, but were you not happier when, as a poor but free boy, you had not taken upon yourself the great responsibility of restoring the name of Rancogne? Is it really not a dream? Was it not only yesterday that the dying beggar said to me in his fever: 'You believe me! Rancogne is saved!' Ah, no, it was not yesterday. Weeks, months, and years have passed since then, and you are still at the beginning of your work.

"You should preserve Ursula from Legigant's snares, bring Jacquemin on the right path again, make one happy

through the other, and in this way console Nini Moustache and Madame Jacquemin.

"You should preserve the Countess de Puysaie from despair, help Lila to get the place in the world which belongs to her, and free Cyprienne.

"Oh, why are there so many wicked people in the world! Legigant, Dr. Toinon, Colonel Fritz, Matifay—all rich and powerful—are condemned by the unswervable justice of the Countess of Monte-Cristo!"

Thus Joseph thinks, filled with sadness and almost ready to give up the struggle. Suddenly his eyes fall upon a relic, upon a rose, a dark-red rose fastened in the frame of the mirror, and as he stroked the hair back from his forehead, he exclaimed:

"It must be done, for only through the destruction of those people can she be rescued. Therefore to work!"

With these words he quickly threw off his jumper and proceeded to dress himself in elegant style.

His transformation is complete. It is no longer Joseph but the rich Vicomte Don Jose de la Cruz!

He then opens the door and proceeds to go down the stairs.

On the corridor he paused and listened.

A moan came from Cinella's attic.

Joseph's pretty face became suddenly sad and he murmured:

"Poor Pippiona! I had almost forgotten her! She has no Ursula any more!"

And he hurriedly returned to his room, lighted his candle again and softly knocked at Cinella's door.

No one answered.

He opened the door and looked in.

The chairs were topsy-turvy, the lamp lay in pieces in a corner and the bed was in disorder.

Joseph felt something slippery under his feet. He examined it—it was blood. Blood was spattered all over the room.

The bed was empty, and in the darkest corner of the room Joseph discovered Pippiona.

Joseph went toward her.

At first she retreated from him.

"My poor little Pippiona," murmured Joseph, "you must be sensible and go to bed again."

The little one did not answer.

"What have you in your hand?" asked Joseph as he advanced another step and attempted to take a bundle she pressed toward her bosom.

"It is Mistigris!" she said, bursting into tears, "my poor Mistigris. He killed him; the wicked man killed him. He carried Ursula away and murdered Mistigris. Oh, sooner or later he will kill me too."

"No, Pippiona," he said, "if you come with me he will not kill you."

"I should go with you?" she asked. "Where do you want to bring me to?"

"To some one who loves you," replied Joseph, "to some one who loves your good friend Ursula, and whom Ursula honors."

"And Mistigris?" she asked.

"If you so desire, we can take Mistigris along with us," said Joseph with a faint smile.

"In that case!" exclaimed the little one, dancing about the room, "I shall go at once—at once."

"You are not afraid of me, are you?" asked Joseph.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Pippiona, although she trembled in every limb. "I am not afraid of you. I have never seen such a friendly face as yours. You are good, and I love you!"

CHAPTER XXXII

WHAT OCCURRED IN THE COACH

THE carriage rolled on further and further. With heavy head, as in a dream, Louis pressed the girl to his bosom.

"If she dies," he said to himself, "If the dose was too strong, if I sit beside a corpse when day breaks!"

At these terrible thoughts he threw back the veil, cloak, and other wraps which enveloped Ursula, and held his cheeks close to her lips.

He felt the fresh, warm breath of the young girl, and an indescribable feeling of joy and tranquillity filled his heart.

Ursula made a movement in her sleep, and uttered a long-drawn sigh.

"If she wakes up and questions me, what shall I tell her?" he thought to himself.

The coach had passed the bridge of Saint-Cloud, and was now on that charming bank of the Seine whereon the pretty villages of Bellevue, Louveciennes, and Meudon lie.

The coach stopped.

It had passed a green-painted gate which had closed behind it again.

The coachman got down from the box and opened the door of the carriage.

Jacquemin recognized our friend Clement.

"Quick, quick," said the latter, "give me the girl. The doctor's medicine, no doubt, produces a good deep sleep, but it is much nicer to sleep in a soft bed. Besides, we have no time to lose. In another hour we must be in Paris again."

Jacquemin obeyed without saying a word.

He no longer lived nor thought.

He no longer doubted that Ursula was loved by Joseph. If he did not love her, why did he interest himself in her? why did he undertake this mysterious abduction? If this fixed idea had not already taken possession of Jacquemin's mind, it would necessarily have done so, by what he was destined to see in the course of the day.

The door of the house, a pretty little villa, was opened, and a buxom little woman, enveloped in a shawl, came toward the carriage.

"Well, well?" she cried.

"Well," replied Clement, "here she is. Our princess has been torn from the hands of the wicked magician. For the present she only needs a soft well-warmed bed."

"Everything is ready inside. The poor little thing! She must be nearly frozen!"

And the handsome buxom little Madame Rozel—for it was she—bent over Ursula and kissed her on the forehead.

"Ah!" thought Louis Jacquemin, "he intrusts her to his sister! He does this because he loves her."

But he soon thought better of it.

"So much the better!" he said to himself. "You have

not deserved her, Louis Jacquemin; you are not worthy of such happiness. Joseph, on the other hand, is a good fellow; he is worthy of her."

Jacquemin was under the impression that Ursula was Celine on account of the close resemblance.

With bowed head, and restraining his grief, he carried Ursula into the house.

Five minutes later he came out again in company with Clement, who smiled when he saw Jacquemin look so sad.

"Well, friend, what are you thinking of?" he asked.

"I think," replied Jacquemin, "that there are people who are so happy as to have always been courageous and upright."

"God is good!" exclaimed Clement; "remorse, the will not to sin any more, that is the key to paradise."

And humming a merry refrain he climbed again upon the box.

CHAPTER XXXIII

LEGIGANT SEARCHES

ON THE day following the events related in the last chapter, a great council took place in the Rue du Faubourg Montmartre.

The three chiefs of the association, Legigant, Toinon, and Colonel Friz, were together.

Colonel Fritz had some important and bad news to tell his companions, namely, that the Countess de Puysaie had disappeared, and consequently the marriage of Cyprienne had been postponed.

Toinon had to tell the result of his mission at Pippiona's house.

Legigant had to report about the abduction of Ursula.

The importance of the news conveyed by the colonel could not be gainsaid.

Legigant and the colonel were busy conversing about the best methods to avert a calamity, and while they were speaking they were interrupted by a loud war of words in the antechamber.

It was as if the clerks were trying to prevent some one from entering, and an angry woman's voice shrieked above the tumult.

"I tell you, though," shrieked the voice, "he is there! and I must and will go in!"

The door of the office was torn wide open, and on the threshold appeared the purple face of Madame Gosse.

Beside her was her husband, whom she firmly held by the collar of his coat.

"Forward, march!" exclaimed the huge, stout woman, as she gave him a push which sent him flying into the middle of the room.

"Where is Ursula, I say?" exclaimed Madame Gosse, with her hands on her hips.

"You know as well as I do," Legigant replied.

"Yes, yes," said Madame Gosse; "I see you want to tell me some other story."

"We do not intend to lie to you, Madame Gosse, and—"

"Really? Why do you let me get in a carriage which brings me at one gallop to Chaton?" cried Madame Gosse, almost beside herself with rage. "Why do you let me drive around the whole night under the pretext I shall accompany Ursula—where I do not know? In Chaton I found no Ursula, and at my house neither. I want my Ursula back again, do you understand me? I shall not move from this spot until you tell me where Ursula is."

"But," cried Legigant, "explain yourself more clearly. Ursula was—"

"Ah! don't make out you are innocent. Ursula has been abducted, and God knows where you brought her, while your carriage brought me to Chaton."

"Who could have abducted the girl?" cried Legigant. "I give you my word of honor that everything was to occur just as we had agreed upon, and since Ursula has not gone with you, I do not know what has become of her. Tell me, therefore, everything which occurred; perhaps we can find some trace, and I swear to you that I will be

the first one to give back Ursula to you, if I can find her."

The tone in which Legigant spoke was so sincere that Madame Gosse could not hesitate any longer, and had to believe his assurances.

She, therefore, began in a gentler tone than before:

"What shall I say? I know nothing more than that I fell asleep in the coach and woke up in it this morning on the bridge of Chaton."

"Alone?" asked Legigant.

"Entirely alone."

"And when did you come back to Paris?"

"About eight o'clock."

"And Ursula was neither at your house nor at Pippiona's?"

"No, nor at the workshop either."

"Then," said Legigant, "it is clear that some one interferes with our affairs. Listen to what I tell you, Madame Gosse. This whole thing must be kept secret. Go home again, find out what happened from Cinella, and if you hear of anything new let me know."

During this whole interview Monsieur Gosse was silent. From time to time he threw a warning look at his wife.

Madame Gosse pretended not to see it, and in the tone of a policeman who leads a vagabond to prison she said:

"Forward, good-for-nothing!"

As for Legigant, he intimated to Colonel Fritz and Dr. Toinon that they should leave the room likewise.

He must meditate alone over the matter.

He came to the conclusion that there was some mysterious connection between the Countess of Puysaie's disappearance and that of Ursula.

This double failure of his plans must be the work of some secret enemy.

Who was this enemy? This question must be answered at any price.

Who could have an interest in the breaking off of Cyprienne's marriage?

Who could be interested in Ursula's fate?

To these two questions Legigant found only one answer—one name.

That name was Nini Moustache.

Ursula was Nini's sister, and Nini had declared that it was repugnant to her to bring about Loredan's ruin.

Legigant knew Nini Moustache very well, and he did not think her capable of opposing his plans without being urged on by some one else.

But no matter. The thing had to be probed to the bottom, and Legigant therefore wrote a short note to Nini Moustache.

After he had done this, and given the note to one of his clerks to deliver, he felt calmer.

The Countess de Puysaie—this was the natural explanation—could have merely wished to escape from the tyranny of her husband and Colonel Fritz. And why should not Celine try to free her sister from the threatened guardianship of Legigant?

An understanding between Nini Moustache and the haughty Countess of Puysaie, though, was in the highest degree improbable.

The third hypothesis, namely, that a stranger knew of all of Legigant's plans, alone remained.

Legigant's suspicion, of course, immediately fell on Colonel Fritz and Dr. Toinon.

Was one of them the mysterious opposer of his plans?

As for the doctor, Legigant, after three minutes' thinking, came to the conclusion that he was innocent.

But how was it with regard to the colonel?

The latter was a more serious opponent.

If Cyprienne's marriage did not take place, then Colonel Fritz would find it as difficult to come into possession of Matifay's millions as Legigant himself.

The colonel had therefore just as much interest in Cyprienne's marriage to the banker as Legigant, and therefore the flight of the Countess de Puysaie could not be charged to him.

But who else could it be?

At this moment the clerk opened the door of the office again and said:

"The lady is here."

"That cannot be she!" thought Legigant; "she would not be in such a great hurry to get examined. Yet who knows? The devil is shrewd, and a woman is still shrewder; I am shrewder than the devil and woman taken together."

Like a windstorm, Nini Moustache burst into the room.

"What have you written me here?" she cried. "What has happened to Ursula?"

"Ursula has disappeared."

"Disappeared! Then it is true. Oh, Legigant, what you are doing is a shame. Yet I was warned not to have anything to do with you, as sooner or later you would betray me."

"Ah! you were told that," thought Legigant. "I must find out who the person was who told her."

"And I, fool that I was, did not believe it. I thought

you would at least keep your word. Ursula has been abducted by you, and no one else was the tempter but you."

"I," replied Legigant, shrugging his shoulders. "You are out of your senses, my child."

"My Ursula, my white pigeon, demeaned the way I have been! Oh! no, no, Legigant. You may be strong and I am weak, but I swear to you it shall never happen."

Legigant thought best not to answer, contenting himself with merely shrugging his shoulders.

"What," continued Nini Moustache, "shall I do to get my sister back again? I was told that you would try to take back from me the money stolen from the Count de Puysaie—the price of my disgrace and my share of the booty—and to do this you would threaten me through my sister. Well, I have brought the money along. Here are the bank-notes, the amount obtained for the house, the jewelry—everything!"

As she said this she threw a heavy package on the desk.

"Here, take it," she continued; "give me back Ursula! Give me back my sister!"

Legigant still remained silent.

"But what do you want?" began Nini again. "Speak! Name your conditions! Shall some one else be ruined? Shall I be handsome once more? Shall I dry my eyes and smile again? Good, so be it. I will begin over anew. I will be the mad Nini Moustache. Oh, do not fear anything! I will not resist any more. Give me back my sister."

"I swear to you, Nini, that if it were in my power I would give your sister back to you; but I really do not know what has become of her."

"I do not know your plans!" she said, "but I will guess and foil them. If I am too weak to do it alone, I will get assistance!"

And not waiting for Legigant's answer, she went away, without casting a look at the package of bonds she had thrown down.

"Go ahead!" murmured the speculator in vice. "Your little teeth are too weak to bite seriously. I must, above all, find out the person who gave her advice. Without a doubt she will soon go to him and tell him of everything which has occurred here."

With these words, Legigant locked the door of his private office, and went down the stairs and into the street.

The folds of a black dress disappeared just then into the passage of Jouffroy.

Legigant hurried after this dress, which he thought he recognized, and soon observed that he had not been mistaken.

It was really Nini Moustache.

Legigant followed her, taking care that she should not see or hear him.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE ANGER OF A LIONESS

AT THE same hour that Legigant, Toinon and Colonel Fritz were holding a council, a conference of the same kind took place at the house of the handsome Aurelie.

Don Jose de la Cruz related to her Ursula's and Pippiona's abduction. They had brought them to Madame Lamouroux's house. The faithful Madame Postel, who was none other than Madame Jacquemin, brought her news of the Countess of Puysaie.

"The first day the countess wept a great deal," she related, "but now the quiet of the retreat has descended upon her, and our sisters have strengthened and consoled her. She has confidence in you, and she lays not only her own fate in your hand, but the fates of the dearest beings on earth to her, her husband and her daughter."

"That is good," said Aurelie; "I will write to her. Wait a little, my dear Jacquemin. You can take my letter to her. In the meanwhile you can go with Joseph. He has a good many things to tell you about your son, and I hope what he has to say to you will give you pleasure."

With these words Aurelie stretched out her hand to

say good-by to Don Jose and Madame Jacquemin. The latter seized the proffered hand and kissed it.

"May God bless you for all that you are doing for him," she said.

Aurelie remained alone in her boudoir.

She had no need of restraining herself now—she had no *rôle* to play.

She was no longer the luxurious Countess of Monte-Cristo or the cynical Aurelie, or the soft, angelic Madame Lamouroux. She was now Helene again.

Poor Helene!

Voices were heard in the corridor.

Aurelie recognized Nini, and went to the door herself and opened it.

"What do you wish?" she coldly asked.

"What do I want? A proof of the power you claim to possess by giving my sister back to me. That's what I want!"

"Your sister? Go and ask Legigant to give her to you."

"Then I was not mistaken! It is really he! But you will assist me, Aurelie, will you not?"

"You have had more confidence in Legigant than in me. You must look to him for aid. I do not recognize you any more."

"Yes!" exclaimed Nini Moustache, as she threw herself on her knees. "I was cowardly. Yes, Aurelie, I betrayed you. But forgive me. I will be your servant, anything you wish, if you give me back my sister."

"If I do return your sister to you," replied Aurelie, "you will betray me again to-morrow the way you have betrayed me to-day. I will therefore wait—"

"You want to wait? What for?"

"Until your soul is steeled by grief and fear. I will wait until your loud sobs become changed into silent ones. Only then can you come back, and I will perhaps assist you."

"Ah! you too desert me! Then I am lost!"

She laughed bitterly.

"Did you ever think seriously of aiding me? Did you really have the power to do so?"

"You see you still doubt," said Aurelie.

"Why should I not doubt? You were going to do wonders for me. You were going to rescue me from Legigant and cure Jacquemin of the love which racks his heart. Did you not promise to do all that?"

"Yes, I promised it to you," said Aurelie. "What then?"

"What then? You too have a secret motive in being mixed up in this matter. I ask you now what you desire to gain with my help? I will stand by you in any case if you rescue my poor Ursula out of Legigant's hands."

"That has been done already," replied Aurelie. "Ursula is no longer with the Gosses. She disappeared last night. She is no longer in the power of Legigant. She has been brought to a safe place according to my orders, where he will not be able to find her; where she will remain until I can send for you without your blushing before her; until I can say: Ursula, my child, embrace your sister."

"Are you telling me the truth?" asked Nini.

"Do you doubt my word?" exclaimed Aurelie, in such a tone that Nini was convinced.

"Then forgive me. But since you know where Ursula is, restore her to me! Aurelie, you will give her back to me, won't you?"

"No," replied Aurelie, "I will not restore her to you."

Nini Moustache sprung up from her chair.

"No!" repeated Aurelie, "I will not give her back to you."

"You will not? Then—oh, you force me to tell you things which—"

"I will not give her back to you!" repeated Aurelie.

"What right have you to do that?" asked Nini. "By what right do you take my sister from me? To protect her? Suppose I do not want you to protect her? Is she your sister or mine?"

"All women are my sisters."

"Ah, I know. You want to give me some more of your hypocritical remarks. I want my sister, I tell you! You must give me my sister back again!"

Nini frothed at the mouth as she sat down again.

"You do not think I speak the truth!" exclaimed Aurelie. "I will show you a person whose word you will not doubt!"

She went to an inside door, and exclaimed:

"Come here, madame! Come and forgive me for the pain this unhappy child forces me to give you!"

Nini Moustache had arisen from her chair, but fell back again almost immediately, murmuring:

"Madame Jacquemin!"

"Look," said Aurelie, "be punished for your doubts. This is my proof. She is the mother of the son whom you ruined. She is also Ursula's mother, for you have sacrificed all your rights in your sister. This woman strained her poor eyes to earn the daily bread for Ursula. How can you speak of your rights? How can you say: 'Give me my sister back again?' This woman, on the

other hand, has a right to call Ursula her daughter, and she intrusted her to me."

Madame Jacquemin nodded.

She then stretched out her motherly arms and cried:

"Celine! My child!"

The poor unfortunate had been waiting for that word and that gesture. Sobbing loudly, she threw herself in the outstretched arms, laid her head on Madame Jacquemin's shoulder, and could only stammer the words:

"Pardon! Pardon!"

She then turned toward Aurelie and said:

"Forgive me, too, Aurelie! Ah, you were right. Oh, let me weep. I no longer doubt. Yes, Aurelie, I believe you. You are really a divine being, who suffers with us and forgives us our sins. I know now that Ursula will be better defended by you than by me, and I bless you."

"And you are right in doing so, Celine," said Madame Jacquemin. "Your heart is a better counsellor to you than your reason. See and honor in our protectress a saint."

"Or at least a faithful friend," said Aurelie, as she seized Nini's hand. "And now," she added, "do you still want me to return Ursula to you?"

Nini Moustache did not have time to answer, for the interview was suddenly interrupted by Don Jose.

He hurried toward Aurelie, and spoke a few words to her.

The former turned pale and leaned on a chair for support.

"I had hoped," she softly said, "that this meeting could be avoided. But as it is necessary, let God's will be done."

The voice became gradually stronger.

"You can speak aloud, Don Jose. What did you say?"

"A man asked the janitor of the house to-day for the names of the tenants. The janitor is faithful, and said nothing. The indiscreet questioner is still outside in the street, and he is none other than Legigant."

"Then he must have followed me," murmured Nini.

"Good!" said Aurelie; "tell the janitor to let himself be questioned."

"Is that meant to be serious?" asked Don Jose. "You really want to meet this man alone?"

"Listen, Don Jose. Legigant must see me, he must speak to me, and he must imagine that it was entirely owing to his shrewdness."

She was silent for a while, and then continued:

"Now leave me alone. Before I meet that man I must collect my courage. He must be opposed with his own weapons. Beware, Legigant! You have not Helene to deal with now, but Aurelie."

The other three had discreetly withdrawn.

Aurelie lowered the light a little and let the curtains down, so that the boudoir should be in semi-darkness.

She then sat in front of the mirror, and studied her most seductive smile.

During the preparations half an hour had elapsed.

The door opened. A maid brought a visiting card on a costly porcelain plate.

"Legigant!" Aurelie read.

She then added in a loud voice:

"Please tell the gentleman to step in. I expected him."

CHAPTER XXXV

LEGIGANT THINKS HE HAS FOUND AN ACCOMPLICE

THE tone of Aurelie's voice went to Legigant's heart. Motionless, timid and hesitating, he stood there and seemed to hear in the past, in the terrible, distant past, the echo of that voice.

Aurelie pushed a chair toward him and repeated:

"I expected you, Monsieur Legigant."

"You expected me?"

"Certainly," continued Aurelie, "and you see I had a reason for doing so, for you are here."

Legigant bowed deeply.

"I expected you," continued Aurelie again, "for the same reason which induced you to see me."

She laid her delicate white hand on Legigant's arm and continued:

"Let us be candid, Monsieur Legigant. We do not know who will be the strongest at this game. You have not yet told me to what I am indebted for the honor of this visit. Will you permit me to guess it?"

Legigant nodded in token of assent.

A short pause ensued, which Aurelie was the first to break.

"Are you a lover of the chase, Monsieur Legigant?

"Without a doubt. Well, we are both hunting to-day for the same game—the millions of the Banker Matifay. It could be seen beforehand that a day would come when our paths crossed, when, in a word, we would meet either as friends or enemies. That is why you come, my dear Monsieur Legigant, and that is why I expected you."

"Then all that we need know," said Legigant, smiling, "is whether we shall agree or not?"

"I hope for your sake that the former will be the case," replied Aurelie, coldly. "Otherwise the game will, perhaps, escape; certainly you would not be the one to bag it."

Legigant shrugged his shoulders.

"You doubt it," continued Aurelie. "Listen to me five minutes longer and I will convince you of the truth of my statements. You want to bring the Count de Puysaie to the brink of despair, so that he should, from necessity, make his daughter Matifay's wife, and in that way unite in Cyprienne, Lila's sister, the fortunes of the banker and her mother. That is a very good scheme. Nini Moustache was a useful tool, and I must say you used her in a very skilful way. To-day, however, the tool slips from your hands. Ursula is not in your power, but in mine. You see I am not playing a hidden game. If you become my ally, I will continue your work, and Nini will continue hers with the Count de Puysaie. If you do not, I can tell you in advance that the marriage will never take place. In less than two days the count will oppose it just as strongly as his wife does at present."

"So long as the latter refuses to consent, I can't see the use of the count's approval," murmured Legigant.

"Wait a moment," said Aurelie; "I was just going to speak about that. You understand that it was to my interest to put obstacles in your path, so that I might have an opportunity to tell you what I say to you to-day: 'Let us divide!' For that reason I abducted Ursula, and for that reason, too, I robbed you of the Countess de Puysaie, at the very moment her presence was necessary for the success of your plan."

"And where is the countess?"

"I know where she is. If we bring the alliance I proposed to you to a conclusion, the count will receive his wife's consent to his daughter's marriage within two days. Lila is the only thing then that remains."

"Could you find out where she is, too?" exclaimed Legigant.

"So much the easier," replied Aurelie, "since she has never been lost to me."

"If you are so strong," said Legigant, distrustfully, "and if you already have so many trumps in your hand, what interest induces you to have an accomplice? Why do you not want to pursue the millions alone? In that case you would not have to divide with any one."

"Why?" replied Aurelie. "Because I fear you, and because I would rather have you for an ally than for an enemy."

"That is all very nice," said Legigant; "but, suppose I accept your proposition, my plan would have to be combined with yours, of which I know nothing. What are your intentions in that respect?"

Aurelie rolled her chair close to Legigant's, looked him steadily in the face, and said:

"You are a man, just as I want one, and I am a woman

such as you need. Both of us together, Legigant, could, if we so desired, overthrow this whole decayed society, which is our common enemy. Riches, luxury, power, and light belong to us. The first victims I ask of you are Dr. Toinon and Colonel Fritz."

"But," cried Legigant, "the colonel is Lila's father, and, consequently, the only link between us and the Baroness of Matifay's millions, supposing, of course, that we shall succeed in making Cyprienne that. Then—"

"Well, then?" interrupted Aurelie. "I told you before, your plan was too complicated. With my plan I need only one ally, and that's you. Look at me, Legigant, do you think I am—handsome?"

With a coquettish gesture Aurelie laid her two hands upon Legigant's shoulders, and he felt through the fine lawn stuff the quivering marble of her white arms.

He raised his eyes and met those of the handsome woman.

The perspiration stood on his brow, and he felt himself growing weak.

"Ah!" sighed Aurelie as she leaned on his shoulder, "if you could only love me! Do you know what I would offer you besides my love? Matifay's millions, together with the reputation of unimpeachable integrity and uprightness. Listen to what I have done. I have brought the Countess de Puysaie to a retreat she will never leave, for otherwise she would expose her disgrace, and Lila to the revenge of her husband. The countess looks upon me as a saint! Even while plotting hers and her daughter's ruin, they would fall on their knees and thank me. If any one attempted to slander me to them, they would show the slanderer to the door."

Aurelie paused a moment and then continued:

"I abducted Ursula as you intended to do, didn't you? What did Nini Moustache say to you? She very probably threatened you; for she is a dangerous enemy, or at least can become so. Well, at present she knows that I abducted her sister, and how do you think she received the intelligence? By shedding tears on my hands, and calling me her guardian angel and her providence. In the same way, Cyprienne will, on the day when she becomes a widow and I take her fortune from her, bless me and swear that I saved her. On that day, I will marry her to the man she loves, and the man she loves is my slave."

Aurelie smiled at Legigant, and quickly added:

"He is an innocent accomplice, whom I picked up when he was poor and ignorant, to make one of the most elegant cavaliers in Paris out of him. That is the young man whom I shall make a millionnaire and the husband of Cyprienne. What could he refuse us?"

"But suppose he does refuse?" said Legigant.

"He loves Cyprienne, and a word from me could put an end to his hopes in that direction. We marry Cyprienne to my protege, make two persons happy and us rich at the same time. On the day of the wedding we find the until then unknown father of Don Jose de la Cruz, and it turns out that you are the father and I am the mother. That is my plan. Nothing would then remain for us but to get rid of the opponents whom you gave a part to play in your plan. Dr. Toinon—"

"Oh, that fellow," said Legigant, "is not very dangerous, for he is a big coward. A sum of money which would enable him to live comfortably would be sufficient to close his mouth."

"But," said Aurelie, "we must close Colonel Fritz's mouth too. You need not worry about that; you must not have anything to do with that matter. If we pretend to be Cyprienne's parents-in-law, your reputation must be as irreproachable as mine."

"As yours?" asked Legigant.

"Yes, as mine," repeated Aurelie, calmly. "If the handsome Aurelie completes her work in a few days or weeks, she ceases to exist any more, and there is only her double living in Paris, the Countess of Monte-Cristo. Every one knows that the honor of the Countess of Monte-Cristo is untarnished."

Legigant opened his eyes wide with astonishment.

"The Countess of Monte-Cristo!" he exclaimed. "The aristocratic lady of whom all Paris has been talking for six months."

"Am I!" replied Aurelie, coldly. "I purposely veiled myself in this secrecy, and no one will be surprised if I take my real name of the Countess de la Cruz back again, and officially represent my son and my husband. I am in possession of papers proving the identity of all three of us."

As she said these words she went to a bureau and took therefrom a paper, and handed it to Legigant.

The letter, signed by a royal name, was addressed to the Countess of Monte-Cristo, and only contained a few lines. These lines spoke of a great misfortune which had happened years before, the secret of which his majesty knew.

The conclusion of the letter formally authorized the bearing of the name of Countess of Monte-Cristo.

Legigant gave the letter back again to Aurelie after

he had read it, and could not conceal his surprise any longer.

"At the first words you addressed to me," he said, "I recognized your strength, but now I bow down. You are a genius."

"You are too good," said Aurelie, ironically; "my secret is a very simple one. It consists of always telling the truth, but never the whole truth. That is the method women have discovered to lie, and it is the best one. But let us return to our subject. Where are the proofs of Lila's birth?"

"In the colonel's hands."

"How stupid!" murmured Aurelie; "a moral proof of the colonel's parentage would be sufficient."

"That would be easy to get from the Gosses, who know the colonel."

"The Count de Puysaie must begin to suspect his old friend—his jealousy must be continually excited until he finally has evidence in his hands of the treachery of Colonel Fritz. Then—"

"Well, then?"

"Then he will kill him."

"The count is very weak, though," murmured Legigant, "and the colonel very strong."

"That doesn't matter! The count hates the colonel, I tell you; he hates him from instinct; how much more will he hate him when he has a better reason than before? Yes, the colonel is a splendid shot and fencer, but the count must punish a dastardly piece of treachery, and not only avenge his wounded honor, but also his wife's and daughter's. Therefore, I tell you, Colonel Fritz will turn pale in spite of his courage. He will

tremble before this weak opponent, his eyes will sink on the ground, his hand will shake, and he will be shot down like a dog."

"Then we will have one accomplice less!" exclaimed Legigant.

"And one friend more," added Aurelie, "for the count will thank us for the justice he had an opportunity to mete out."

CHAPTER XXXVI

AURELIE'S LAST VICTORY

AURELIE had seated herself in front of a mirror again.

"And Matifay?" asked Legigant.

"I was thinking of him," she said. "You ought to have a means to get rid of him."

"Yes, at least one would soon come to my mind. Besides, an old grudge exists between him and me; and the means, even though it were a forcible one, would not make me hesitate, if I were once opposed to him."

"A forcible means would be a bad one," she said; "blood must not be shed, for it leaves spots. No, no, Legigant—we must find out if he has any particular passion."

"His love for Cyprienne, for instance," remarked Legigant, timidly.

"Yes," said Aurelie, or the Countess of Monte-Cristo —for it is, from now on, all the same whether we designate her by the one or the other name—"I think of using his love as a weapon. This love, though, is not Matifay's principal passion. We must find that out. Yes, we must know the passion of his whole life, and I believe I can guess it—Matifay's principal passion is fear."

"Fear!" exclaimed Legigant.

"Yes," said the countess. "I have my spies, too, and I know the dark side of Baron Matifay's life. I know that he passes his nights in fear and trembling. I must now find out the cause of this. As you have known him for a long time, I count upon you to find out this secret for me."

Legigant became pale, too.

"The reason for Baron Matifay's sleeplessness must be remorse—a guilty conscience," he stammered.

"I think that must be it," remarked Aurelie, as she looked sharply at him. "Then that story of Noirmont is true then?"

This time Legigant had not the strength to answer; he merely nodded with his head.

"I only know part of that story," continued Aurelie. "I read it in the newspapers—I was an actress at that time—and studied the portraits which at the time were made of the Countess of Rancogne, for I was to play the part of the countess in a drama which treated of that case. I made a big success in it. A great many compliments were bestowed upon me on account of my resemblance to the portraits of that unhappy woman. Have you ever known her?

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Legigant.

Aurelie had turned toward her mirror, and while Legigant could only see her back, she did not lose a movement of his face in the glass.

"She was about my stature, was she not?" continued Aurelie.

"Yes, madame. Probably a little taller."

"Was she blond?"

"Yes, but not so light as you are."

"Ah! ash blond—that could be done with a little powder. I have got some here. How did she wear her hair?"

"I believe in braids."

"That is the fashion in the country. And the eyes?"

"Blue—sky-blue!"

"How was she dressed at the trial?"

"In a black dress with a fichu."

"Yes, yes; a *fichu a la Marie Antoinette.* What did she have on her head?"

"A black veil."

"Of lace or tulle?"

"Lace."

The last answer of this examination fell from Legigant's lips like a sigh of relief.

"You have not told me anything about her walk?" said the Countess of Monte-Cristo, continuing her examination.

"It was slow and majestic, like that of a queen."

"I used to be a tragedienne," said Aurelie, smiling; "and I know how Andromache walks. One word more! Was there not something characteristic in her gestures and manners?"

"During her last days," stammered Legigant, "she always went about with a Bible or a rosary in her hand."

"Those things, I must confess, are a rarity here," said Aurelie, "but to-day this necklace will answer for the rosary. The curtain can go up. Is it right thus?"

She had turned hurriedly around, and pale, the black veil thrown back from her forehead, with fixed look and outstretched hand, she strode upon Legigant.

The latter rose slowly, opened his mouth in terror, but could not bring forth a sound. He recoiled from the terrible apparition and ran toward the window.

He clutched the folds of the curtains to keep from sinking on his knees, and exclaimed:

"Mercy, Helene, mercy!"

A loud burst of laughter answered him.

"Well," exclaimed the Countess of Monte-Cristo, "it seems my manager did not pay my salary for nothing the time I was an actress."

When Legigant heard these words from the lips of a phantom, he raised his eyes.

The phantom had disappeared.

The veil lay on one side of the carpet and the dark-brown mantilla on the other, while Aurelie was laughing heartily.

"Then you were mixed up in the affair, too, my dear Legigant. I did not know that, for I don't remember to have read your name at the trial."

Suddenly she became serious.

"That proves," she said, "how unwise it would have been for you to get rid of Matifay by means of the dagger. Poison is just as unsafe! The victim does not always die immediately; he speaks sometimes, and I believe, in this particular case, he could tell some extraordinary things."

Legigant trembled in every limb.

"You are right," he stammered.

"If a theatrical resemblance," she continued, "has such an effect on a strong brave man like you, what must it have on a frightened, cowardly, poor old man like the baron; in this way one kills safer than with arsenic or a

pistol-ball, my dear Legigant. Matifay is lost, I am certain of it. Our success is assured, and you can make your preparations for our wedding."

Legigant attempted to take Aurelie's hand.

She repelled him.

"Let us wait," she said. "On the day after the victory the mutual reward we give each other will be all the sweeter. I do not want you to give me a premature promise," she added, in a firm tone, "which you will probably regret to-morrow."

He shook his head.

"I have unveiled my plans in all their details to you," she continued; "in the first place, because I wished to convince you; and, secondly, because—should we accidentally become enemies—it is a matter of indifference to me whether you knew more or less of my projects. From the moment you knew of my existence, you were just as dangerous to me as if you had known the whole."

She paused a few seconds, and then continued:

"What I want you to do is to no longer think of the past or your former plans. I ask a great deal, but I shall give a great deal. Your responsibility will not begin until the day Cyprienne is united to Baron Matifay, so that you should not have an opportunity to doubt a power which, until now, you only know through my assurances. But after I have done that, I think I will have convinced you that I can do the rest. From that day on, however, you must belong entirely to me and our work—else— I know your passion, too, my dear Legigant. There would be one victim more—that would be all!"

She said all this in a calm, gentle tone, and Legigant had not the power to rebel.

"That's settled," continued Aurelie. "I will undertake to secure the consent of the Countess de Puysaie, and play upon Nini Moustache, Ursula, Baron Matifay and Cyprienne, so that you need not trouble yourself with these persons any more. That is my share of the work. Now tell me yours, so that I can see whether you have understood me or forgotten anything."

"My work," said Legigant, "is to produce a schism between Colonel Fritz and the Count de Puysaie."

"That's right," said Aurelie; "a few words more. By to-morrow Aurelie, who speaks to you now, and her double, the Countess of Monte-Cristo, will have disappeared from Paris. The latter's mansion is to let. Baron Matifay, who thinks his marriage has been indefinitely postponed, has countermanded the work on his new palace in the Avenue Gabrielle, where he intended to pass the honeymoon. The Puysaie residence will be sold under the hammer before the expiration of two months. Now, Matifay must rent the Monte-Cristo residence until the completion of his own. You, my dear Legigant, will propose the idea to Colonel Fritz. Without a doubt he will immediately inform the baron of the plan, and the latter, for Cyprienne's sake, will hurry to carry it out. I believe that is all. Now, adieu, or rather, *au revoir.*"

"*Au revoir.*"

CHAPTER XXXVII

WHAT A VICTORY COSTS

WHEN the door closed behind Legigant, the Countess of Monte-Cristo, exhausted by this long interview, sank into the chair Legigant had just left. She had had the courage to laugh, to act a comedy and call that rascal her friend!

She had done all that, and had not died for shame!

Now she had to pay dearly for her hardiness.

Poor black veil, poor mantilla of the convicted woman, dear relics, with what tenderness she kissed you, and how many tears did she shed upon you!

The door had softly opened. Don Jose stood in front of her chair and observed this despair.

"I told you, Helene, that the effort would be too great for your courage."

"Yes, unfortunately!" she sighed, "you were right. I felt a wild joy in my heart when I saw that man turn pale before me and recoil in terror from my outstretched hand as if in that soft hand lay the entire force of divine justice."

"You are indeed, Helene," replied Don Jose, "one of the preferred instruments of justice. Go your way and do not turn your foot aside because you strike a scorpion."

She listened to him, but was buried in her own thoughts.

"Oh," she shudderingly murmured, "it is not that alone. Do you know what it means not to be a living

being any more like the others, not to live like the others, to awaken the phantom of the past, to personify the despairing spectre of remorse, to transform one's self into a mighty ghost, and to wander through life, scattering about with full hands fear and madness? And that is what I have resolved to do and this I will do—I, who only thought of spreading consolation and peace about me."

She seated herself at her writing-desk, a masterpiece of art, and wrote feverishly.

"This note to my lawyer," she said, in the brief tone of a general giving his adjutant orders. "The Monte-Cristo mansion must be sold to-day. Or, no," she added, after a moment, "it need only be rented, including furniture and other accessories. To explain this sudden resolve, you can verbally add that the Countess of Monte-Cristo is going on a journey to-morrow. She only desires to retain the small pavilion at the end of the conservatory. Ursula must be looked after, too."

"That shall be attended to," said Joseph, smiling. "Clement and Madame Rozel do wonders."

"In that case," murmured Aurelie, "Madame Lamouroux's work is ended. Therefore see to it that Rozel comes back as soon as possible, to take her place in the house in the Rue Vivienne, and imagine some reason to explain Madame Lamouroux's disappearance."

"No, Helene," he said, "Madame Rozel will not come back. Jacquemine's conversion is getting along very well, but is not yet so assured that we can trust in it. I know you, Helene; hate will not suffice to fill your life. There must still be a small corner left for love. You have assumed the sublime task of protecting and saving others; I have made it my task to protect and save you."

"I thank you," said the countess, "I thank you, my dear Joseph, but these are not wonders which can be done twice."

"Who knows?" replied Joseph, "I only ask of you a few weeks' patience, and the reward of your obedience I shall give you at once."

"At once?" asked the countess in surprise. "A reward?"

"What reward would be worthier than the opportunity to do a good deed?" continued Joseph. "Only attempt it!"

"What is it about?" she asked.

"About Pippiona. The poor little thing has no one now, since Ursula was taken from her, and I took the liberty to bring her to Madame Lamouroux's house. You can therefore see that Madame Lamouroux cannot go away from her, since she still has this unhappy being to console, and perhaps to save."

"Perhaps, you say?" asked the Countess of Monte-Cristo. "Is she very sick?"

"So sick that only an angel from heaven can cure her."

"The poor child! So young too!" sighed the countess.

"You see, Madame Lamouroux is not dead yet," exclaimed Joseph. "Pippiona is just as old as your daughter would be; she is pure as a seraph, pretty as an angel. In the name of your Blanche, love Pippiona!"

The Countess of Monte-Cristo looked at Joseph with her big blue eyes.

"You are right, Joseph," she then said; "I will try to do it."